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My Lady Green Sleeves

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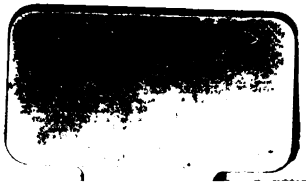

MY LADY GREEN SLEEVES.

MY LADY GREEN SLEEVES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"COMIN' THRO' THE RYE," "LAND O' THE LEAL," "CHERRY RIPE!"
"AS HE COMES UP THE STAIR," "THE TOKEN OF
THE SILVER LILY: A POEM."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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MY LADY GREEN SLEEVES.

BOOK III.—(*Continued*).

CHAPTER VIII.

"O! God, Horatio, what a wounded name!"

IF you can meet me with one-half only of the contempt I feel for myself, be in the flower-walk of Kensington Gardens at five o'clock to-morrow afternoon."

Will she come? Five has struck, and there is no sign of her.

The flower-walk is growing empty—the children are trooping homeward—it is a quarter-past five; she is not coming.

No man of spirit would wait more than twenty minutes for any woman; at the end of that time I turn on my heel homewards, and at the first step come face to face with Florizel. She has been running, and is out of breath; the colour in her face renders less sombre her robes of deepest mourning.

"O! Dick," she cries, pleadingly, "I am so sorry; but I met Hetty in the drive, and I knew you would not like her to know I was going to meet you here, so I had to put her off the scent, and that made me late."

There is no contempt in her voice—in her hand's warm clasp; but I have not met her eyes, and eyes never lie, no matter how the voice, complexion, and touch may. We turn

aside to the trees, and again it is she who speaks, looking anxiously into my face.

"Dick, aren't you glad to see me? have you not a word of welcome for me?"

"No," I say, bitterly, "I am *not* glad to see you, Florizel. If I did not love you so dearly I should say I prayed God I might never see your face, or hear your voice again. I suppose it is easier to bear one's own contempt than that of others, though I used to hold a contrary belief. I believe in nothing now—but you."

Our eyes meet at last; my heart softens; I take the little ungloved hand and lift it to my lips.

A shadow seems to flit by—I look up; someone has passed us whose face I cannot see, but the shape—is it not that of Green Sleeves?

Obeying a sudden impulse, I start up, but she has vanished; surely she is yonder—but

no, when I have overtaken the figure, a strange face is turned to me. I return slowly to Florizel, puzzled and at fault.

"I thought it was Green Sleeves," I say, sitting down again.

"And do you not see her every day?" says Florizel, with something chill, unusual in her voice that makes me turn to look at her.

"No—I have not once seen or spoken to her for three weeks."

"Ah!" the tone grows absolutely cold. "You have been quarrelling, perhaps?"

"Florizel," I say, gravely, "I want you and Green Sleeves, of all people in the world, to be friends—you scarcely saw her before you went away, but if you were better acquainted, you couldn't help loving her."

"Could I not?"

"She is not happy," I say, looking away to the silvery streak of water that shows between

the trees. "No more are we—and, forgive me my poor Florizel, but I had forgotten; I have not said one word to you" (I touch her black gown) "of *this*."

She turns her head aside; but I think that for the moment her heart is not with the father that she tended so long and faithfully.

"And why is she not happy?" she says, not looking round. "She is near you always; she shares your labours, has the right to sit by your side, to wait upon you, while *I*——"

The two last words, sunk to a whisper, barely reach my ears.

"What makes everyone unhappy," I say, bitterly, "but love, or the bastard imitation of it? This poor child does but share the common lot, only she is young to be made to suffer so."

"Does one suffer any the less because one is past the freshness of youth?" she cries, a dull note of anguish running through her voice.

"Youth, at least, is beautiful, and has hope, its springs are yet unbroken; it has *time*, if its first blossoms be blighted, to bloom again."

"There will be no second love for her, or I am much mistaken," I say, my thoughts still filled by that flitting figure, "its roots have struck down into her very soul. You saw something of it before you went away, Florizel," I say, addressing her eagerly. "I did not understand you when you gave me some hints at Cannes, but I do now; tell me, did it strike you as being a thing she was ever likely to *get over?*"

For a moment there flashes into Florizel's eyes something of the contempt that awhile ago I looked to find, then she says, slowly, "No; I do not think she will ever get over it."

"And it is so hopeless, so *utterly* hopeless,"

I say, restlessly. "If only she would consent to marry Siva, I could be almost content."

"She never will. She is faithful; there are women like that."

"There are women better than that," I say, warmly, as I take her hand once more, "who are noble, unselfish, who restore a man's self-respect, so far as it can be restored, by giving him, even in his degradation, a place in their esteem——"

"I beg your pardon," says Mr. Squiffer, appearing with an elaborately composed face round the tree, "but have you seen Charolais? We were to meet her at the Round Pond at half-past five, but we can't find her anywhere."

"Confound you," I cry, in a rage, and dropping Florizel's hand, "how should I know?"

He retreats with a broad grin, and being

joined by Solomon, they depart together, laughing heartily.

"It is time for me to go home," says Florizel, standing up, a weary look on the odd irregular face that not so long ago was my ideal of what a woman's and a wife's should be.

Can it be only three months since when to marry her seemed to me the highest joy attainable, when I longed after her as the poor wretch, immured in his dungeon, pines and thirsts for a breath of God's pure air?

She was out of my reach then; she is no more out of my reach now, but a subtle change has come; as in earnest talk we cross the burnt-up grass, I find time to ask myself in vain from what hidden cause it springs.

"I thought it would be a hard thing to meet you again," I say to her, in my selfishness, as we part at the gates, "but you have made it almost easy."

She looks at me for a moment, a strange light on the pure pale face, and only when she has gone do I remember to ask myself, what have *I* made things to the woman who has made them so easy to me?

CHAPTER IX.

"For the flower that springs in May morning,
Is na sae sweet as she."

DAY by day a fever grows in my veins, a restless vague *want* takes possession of me.

My ears, formerly so dull to aught that lay without my work, grow quick to hearken for interruptions that I formerly reckoned as too frivolous to effect a diversion of thought; a snatch of song, a ripple of laughter, an impertinent nosegay smiling up at me from an open page, an atmosphere unacknowledged, but felt of brightness and

youth, and love, that played about me with a breath pure and sweet as that of heaven.

"I don't know what you have done to Charolais," says the Squiffer, furiously, to me one day; "but she is fit for nothing—can't even run a race, or take a bat, or even hold her own if we chaff her. If you've been quarrelling with her—and if you have, it must be *your* fault, not hers, the sooner you make it up the better."

Siva has gone away, and the little culprit upstairs has been sat upon in judgment, and formally consigned to that perdition which awaits all young women who, having had an eligible offer of marriage, have sinfully refused it. Jill has been to me more than once, pleading to be allowed to take Green Sleeves home with her, but I forbade it, and she went away, thinking perhaps that our cruelties to our enemies are positive kindnesses compared with

those that we practise towards the people whom we love.

And why do I not let her go? It would be better for her—for me, for Siva; she would be taken out of herself, she would not have the same leisure for ever to brood as now over one image. I have always thought that the intensity of a woman's faithfulness depends a great deal on circumstance—for instance, whether any other man of equal moral stature has laid real vigorous siege to her heart; whether her time is her own, in which she has nothing else to do but remember him; or whether the daily work that falls to her hand so engrosses her attention as to give her no time to form the habit of remembering.

Set a woman to sweep or scrub, to brew or bake, to work for others, and ten to one if at the end of a week you don't dub her fickle; concentrate her thoughts on self, and that other

who is but another form of self, and you have a paragon of sublime constancy.

Shall I let the child go? She has made it a question of whether she or I tire first, and, already, I tire.

She could not hide herself from me at Jill's as she does here; she would be obliged to sit at the same table, to speak to me. I should be able to compel a glance from the brown eyes that I miss so terribly, and that come between me and my work, and even between me and Florizel, as of an evening I sit by her side at one or other of my sisters' houses.

Yes; she shall go. My resolution once taken, I shut my book, and go upstairs to the parlour, but she is not there.

Hitherto, I have not sought her; it would have been a breach of honour, seeing how I wrung that promise from her; but, on the other hand, I have not gone out of my way to

avoid her. Her care has sufficed for both; not once have I caught a glimpse of her, save in that momentary one at Kensington Gardens, for above a month.

It was growing dusk when I made my resolution. The house is wrapped in a drowsy quiet, as I go up the stairs to the little room in which I know she is to be found.

"*Charolais!*"

She must have been just inside the door, for, as I speak, it opens, as though I had breathed it apart, and Green Sleeves stands before me.

Enough of light comes through the window behind, to show her as she stands, her brown eyes dull with misery, her little face pallid and pinched with pain; slender hands clasped together, and pressed hard against her bosom.

"I'm tired, Solomon," she says, "and it's

too late to go and search for codlings and cream to-night."

"It is not, Solomon," I say. "Charolais," I go on, abruptly, "I have come to tell you that you shall do as you will—you shall go. I will write to Jill to-night, to fetch you to-morrow."

No answer, only an averted head, an attitude of waiting.

"Is not that what you wished?" I say, restlessly; "is there *no* pleasing you, Charolais?"

"Why do you not call me Green Sleeves?" she says, so low that I can scarcely hear her.

"No," I say, bitterly; "that was the name of a little girl who is dead—this new one, who in her selfish sorrow makes others unhappy also, is Charolais."

"*You* are unhappy?" she cries, quickly; "When—— O! no, that is impossible."

"As you please. You will be ready to go with Jill to-morrow?"

No answer.

"I shall have left before you are risen, so good night and good-bye, Charolais."

She turns; I get a moment's, only a moment's glimpse of her eyes.

"O! Mr. Dick! Mr. Dick!" she says, scarce above a whisper, and, as I move a step towards her, the brown head falls forward, and rests a moment upon my arm . . . and, somehow, I understand how at a bound she has gone back to the old childish days, the old childish love and worship, and how for one brief moment all the misery, the sin, and the misunderstanding that has come between us, is blotted out . . . we are children once again, bound to each other by a hundred ties of reality and of hope.

"Green Sleeves," I say, as I enter the room and close the door behind me, "you shall not

go, I cannot spare you; you shall stay, and we will be wretched together."

I cannot see her face, it is covered; but she is standing beside me, and that is enough.

"Child," I say, abruptly, "have you ever thought of what this house is to me now—how dreary, how empty? And yet *you* would leave me, the last link that binds me to the old times! When I was young and happy, you made yourself my joy and my delight; but now that I want you, you would leave me lonely."

"Do you want me?" she says, trembling; "would you miss me?"

"So badly, that if you go away, I go too; for I cannot live here without you."

"Then I will stay," she says, looking up, not *at* me, but with just a half glance, as though to show me, if I had forgotten, how sweet and true are the beautiful dark eyes.

I draw one of those little hands from her face, and, as I press it against my heart, rest and peace seem to come back to my bosom; the restless ache and longing are stilled, my ills seem bearable now that she and I again are friends.

"Mr. Dick," she says presently, and now the dusk has softly covered her face and she no longer needs to hide it, "ought you to be so very unhappy now—now *she* has come back?"

"I shall be unhappy always, more or less, to my life's end."

"Then she does not love you as she ought," cries Green Sleeves, impetuously, "or she would make you—happy."

"No one living could make me that now. Circumstances might occur to render me less wretched, but my life at best can be but one of endurance."

"Mr. Dick," she says, very low, "O! what is it? Won't you tell me?"

"I made a mistake, child," I say, sadly, "that is all, and I cannot tell you."

"I do not understand it," she says, restlessly—"She loves you—you love her, and yet you are wretched. It *must* be her fault—all hers."

"Green Sleeves," I say, sternly, "never say one word against her—the truest, the purest, the best woman God ever made"—I pause, abruptly. Truest, purest, best, indeed, she is, but the sweetest, the one woman in the world to me!

"I thought once," says Green Sleeves, gently, "that—that there was somebody else; but when I saw you that day with—*her* in the gardens I knew I had been mistaken."

"Then it *was* you?" I cry, quickly.

"Yes—I had gone there to meet the boys."

"I wish you could be friends, child," I say, sadly; "we could all be so happy together. I think, under some circumstances, true friendship might almost take the place of love."

"O! what a barren exchange!" she cries, the words seeming to be flashed out of her; "and I do not think I could be happy with your Lady Florizel," she adds, stiffly.

"I wonder why the women one likes best always like each other least?" I say, puzzled. "One would think that the liking for a common object would be a bond between them."

"O! Mr. Dick," she says, and there is actually the echo of a laugh on her lips, "after all, you do not know the world very well yet!"

"Why, Green Sleeves," I cry, joyfully, "you can laugh—you can be saucy—I do believe we have some chance of being happy yet. Now, are you quite sure you would rather not go away?"

"Quite sure."

"To tell you a secret, Green Sleeves, it would be all the same if you did; for I would have locked you up, starved—even beaten you —but I would *never* have let you go."

CHAPTER X.

"And fair Marg'ret and rare Marg'ret,
And Marg'ret o' veritie,
Gin e'er ye love another man,
Ne'er love him as you did me."

AS a bird that once scared away by a familiar hand now fears to come again within reach of it, I have to win my Lady Green Sleeves back, and it is long indeed e'er confidence is regained, or the ease of friendship established between us.

But the old happy security is passed away—a chance word, a look will drive her from my side for days, and then it is only by infinite

patience and difficulty that I can tempt her to return.

At best I can win from her no more than a half glance, and that but a fleeting one—all my stratagems to get a real look from those dark eyes is in vain, and I gradually make up my mind that until I have obtained it, it is quite impossible that we should consider our reconciliation complete.

"Green Sleeves," I said to her one day, "you told me once that you would never, please God, set eyes upon me again so long as you lived. But then you were angry—do you think it fair to abide by that speech now that we are friends again?"

But I got no answer. She was gone in a moment, and it took me a whole week of patient care to undo the effect of my rash speech.

Rarely indeed can I beguile her to my den,

and then only on the pretext that there is something to be done that she alone can do, and once having persuaded her there, I devise a dozen pretexts for detaining her, quite satisfied if I can occupy her with something that keeps her seated for a few moments beside me, as she used to sit, neither of us speaking, but each happy in the mere fact of being near the other.

To-night I have so laid a snare for her, and as she sits beside me, scissors in hand, intent on the task I have given her, I can look at her to my heart's content, being so very certain that there is not the smallest chance of her looking at me.

I wonder where the fascination that this young person undoubtedly exercises over every male with whom she comes in contact, lies?

True her face is full of charms that peep

out on you unexpectedly, and are not learnt all at once like the numbered and duly appraised ones of a titular beauty, but then it is full of irregularities, and her nose would assuredly arouse in a sculptor no other sensation than that of contempt.

She wears a white gown, and has tied her hair to-day (is a woman's dress any index to her thoughts?) with a blue ribbon; but some silky bits have escaped, and lie on her forehead. Some more of the same dark silk sweeps the clear cheek, into which a little colour has come, the tender young lips are touched with a deeper red; at a first glance one might suppose this girl to be happy . . .

"I have cut out all the pieces you marked," she says, laying down the scissors; and, as I take the extracts from her hand, the door opens to admit—Florizel.

"O! Dick," she cries eagerly, and then

stops short at sight of Green Sleeves, who has risen. Five years have changed the one into a girl, the other into a woman; but surely they have not altered each past recognition?

"Why," I say, leading Green Sleeves forward, "you surely have not forgotten one another?"

"Is that Charolais?" she says, carelessly, and then there is a cold hand shake between them, and Florizel and I are alone.

"I have something to tell you," she says, "I have not seen you for some days, and feared to write it, and that is why I am here this evening." She breaks off in her speech suddenly.

"Dick," she says, "is it *right*?"

"Is what right?" I cry, thinking how a woman's mind will dart away from a momentous matter to a trivial one, and give

the latter all the attention that the former requires.

"After what you told me about her the other day, is it not folly—madness?"

"How can my having her with me alter the facts? It is far better to take her out of her thoughts, to rouse her, than to leave her to brood alone over one unhappy idea."

"Your cure is a strange one," she says, so bitterly, that I look at her in wonder, "only take care that in this instance it is not worse than the complaint."

CHAPTER XI.

"But doth not the appetite alter? A man loves the meat in his youth that he cannot endure in his age."

"IT may be a mere matter of taste," says Pink May, "but in my young days ladies did *not* call on unmarried gentlemen, and remain closeted with them three hours at a time."

"They're going to be married," says Solomon, "and why shouldn't she? Why, in Cornwall, when a man thinks of getting married, he takes the girl home for two or

three days to see how he likes her, before making up his mind; and if she doesn't please him, he just bundles her home again, and nobody says anything."

"That's going rather too far," says the Squiffer, puffing solemnly at his pipe, "but it's high time that some of the nonsense about never leaving two young people of opposite sexes alone together, was thrown overboard. How is a man to get a good notion of a woman's disposition if he never sees her, except with her society-manner on?"

"There are proprieties, dear boy," says Pink May, "and the rules of society must be observed."

"And I say they are *rotten* rules," cries Solomon, warmly, "and that it's paying a precious bad compliment to men, and women, too, to suppose that the mere fact of being in each other's company suggests evil. I suppose

men are not all scoundrels, and every woman's virtue is not a cloak, to be slipped off and on at pleasure——"

"Hush!" says Pink May, "here is Charolais."

"They manage things much better in America," the young man goes on more calmly, as a tall glow-worm seems to approach the seat below the cherry-tree that is the usual rendezvous after dark these hot evenings; "there they have chances of studying each other's characters; they find out before marriage, instead of after, if they don't suit, and look out for somebody who does."

"What is Solomon holding forth about?" says the Squiffer, as he sits down by the others. "Here is your shawl, Charolais."

"Marriage," says Solomon. "Now, if ever I do get married, I'll make or find an opportunity beforehand for a good, downright,

thumping quarrel; for, in my opinion, that's about the *only* sure way of getting at a woman's real character."

"And, pray," says the Squiffer, "has anybody in particular suggested the idea of matrimony to your brilliant intelligence?"

"It was Dick, dear boy," says Pink May. "Lady Florizel has been to see him this evening, you know, and he has just taken her away again."

"Whew!" whistles the Squiffer; "so that was the carriage that nearly knocked me down at the corner, and that made me wonder if the Lord Mayor had suddenly yearned for a sight of Picotee Lane!"

"Yes," says Solomon, "there's no ridiculous, stuck-up pride about *her*, and I like her. I think Dick's a very lucky man—don't you, Charolais?"

"I say," says the Squiffer, "have you made

sure that he's gone? He can hear every word from his den, you know."

"I went and looked; of course he took her home—*I* should, under the circumstances."

"O! she's not much to look at, and she's no chicken; she must be twenty-five, if she's a day."

"She's none the worse for that," says Solomon, loftily; "for my part, I don't like your very young girls—of course, Charolais, *you* are an exception."

"In short," says the Squiffer, "you like 'em mellow. Well, Dick doesn't, and he'll never marry Lady Florizel as long as he lives."

"Pooh!" says Solomon; "it didn't look at all like courting, did it, when you popped round that tree, and there they were, hand in hand, with their noses touching? Though, to be sure," he adds, complacently, "if Dick means nothing, and she has a fancy for being

in the family, I shouldn't half mind proposing for her myself."

A shout of laughter follows this modest speech, which Solomon takes somewhat seriously to heart.

"Let me tell you," he says, with dignity, "that Dick is getting old too, and is not half so handsome as he used to be. Perhaps Lady Florizel might prefer something younger, and more lively."

"O! Solomon," says Green Sleeves, laughing heartily, "had you not better propose to me first, just to get your hand in? I will promise not to accept you, however much I might feel tempted."

"I would like a shot, if I thought you'd have me," he says, with perfect gravity.

"It would be very nice; but, I'm afraid I am too young," she says, "and yet I am —twenty! Five years too old—just five

years too old, auntie—only five." . . . Her voice ends in a sob, and, a moment ago, her laughter mocked me in my wretchedness.

"Why, what is this?" cries Pink May, tenderly (God bless her!) "You are tired, Charolais;" and I think she draws the brown head down to her faithful heart.

"It's all that Dick," says Solomon, vexedly; "she always cries after she has been sitting with or talking to him—don't cry, *dear* Charolais. And I think that he, too, is trying to dry her eyes in the dark with his own pocket handkerchief.

"We haven't been nearly so happy since he came back," says the Squiffer, grumblingly, "and as to Charolais, she's not the same girl—but don't cry, dear little Charolais, *we* love you, if he doesn't."

"It has struck me," says Solomon, "that perhaps, by accident, you know, he committed

a murder while he was abroad, and *that's* what has changed him so. Why, if I had come home with half the money in my pocket that he did, I should walk on my head—it *must* be something very queer to take the shine off his guineas like that, and to make him actually give up the idea of buying back Sieviking."

"How dare you say such wicked things about him?" cries Charolais, passionately; "as if he *could* do a mean, or selfish, or dishonourable action—and yet you talk of his committing a cowardly *crime!* If he is not always laughing and talking, like the rest of us, it is because his head is not empty like ours—but full of thoughts that we can't be expected to understand!"

"He is a tyrant," says Solomon, quite unconvinced, "and that's why he lords it so over all you women. When I'm old enough, I

mean to be a tyrant, too—the better class of female likes it."

"It is not tyranny to know what is good for you, and make you do it," says Green Sleeves, laughing. (Surely, her moods are very variable to-night?) "Supposing, now, that I told you it was time to go to bed, and *made* you go, would that be tyranny?"

"It would be sense," says Solomon, who is nothing if not practical, and presently there troop past my open window some heavy footsteps and some light, and dawn finds me sitting in the place from which I heard them, as though I waited still their echo, or their return.

CHAPTER XII.

"Marti-mas wind, when wilt thou blow,
And shake the green leaves off the tree?
O! gentle death, when wilt thou come?
For of my life I am wearie."

YESTERDAY I had but one secret, to-day I have two.

I hid the other, but this one, that has leaped on me from ambush, unguarded against, unsuspected, to sit down with me beneath my very roof-tree—can I trust myself by neither word, look, nor sign to let it escape me?

As yet it is my own, and I will guard it as

my life—life! that yesterday was but endurance, that to-day falls little short of hell.

She does not love me, never did, never will—thank God for that! and yet, but for my mad folly a year ago, she might have done so, and the misery of four lives have been averted.

And this man that she loves, pitiful as I deemed him, I can envy him now. A fierce spasm of jealousy shakes me as I think of the treasure of love poured out on him, yet I would not have it different.

Strange that the only drop of sweet in my bitter cup should be that the woman I love does not love me; but certain it is that, if I had awakened in her heart such a passion as burns in mine, I should be that compared with which I might to-day reckon myself happy. For this is love, I know it now—nor that pure, steady affection that has burnt so brightly for years, nor that brief delirium in which I flung

away all for a mad fancy, were love—but *this*, the seeds of which, long sown, have silently thriven in my heart to quicken to conscious life to-day.

I could thrust that other mistake out of my sight—its hateful existence was recognised, but did not intrude itself on mine; but this one—how shall I escape from the daily contemplation of it?

Dawn has given place to daylight; the house is astir; cold and stiff, I am about to rise from my chair, when the door opens, and Green Sleeves comes in.

Her dark hair is turned up under a mob-cap, her gown is neatly pinned away out of the dust, in her hand is a freshly-arranged nosegay which, being in a very rickety old glass, she carries with great care, her gaze not leaving it till she has safely deposited it on the table.

Then she sees me, and starts violently, but

all the colour that start brings cannot hide the fact that she has been crying; so more than one has been waking in the house to-night.

"I did not know you were down," she says, "and—and sometimes I come of a morning and put your room straight for you."

And that is why nothing is ever disarranged, yet always so spotlessly free of dust.

"I shall not hinder you, child," I say, mechanically; and then she takes out a duster, and quicker, I think, than usual, and as one who wishes the task over, moves hither and thither, while I sit in my chair and watch her.

When I wanted her presence here, I found it hard and precious to obtain; now that it is for the first time unwelcome, she comes unasked.

"Green Sleeves," I say, when she has nearly done, "come here."

She comes very slowly; a quaint little figure,

with sleeves rolled away from the white arms, mob-cap a little on one side, the prettiest little feet in the world showing below her short skirts.

"Green Sleeves, would you like to go away?"

"*Go away?*" she repeats, blankly, her eyes actually for a moment meeting mine.

"Yes—for a month or two. Hetty would like to have you for a time."

"Do you wish me to go, Mr. Dick?"

"Yes."

"Then I will go," she says, turning aside; "but . . . it was not so very long ago that you wished me to stay."

"Child," I cry, harshly, "I wish to God that when you begged me so hard to let you go, I had granted your request. Now it is too late."

"No," she cries, turning swiftly, but at sight of my face she utters a low cry.

"You are ill," she cries.

"Yes," I say, looking at her with haggard eyes, "ill of something that only death can cure. If ever you pray for me, Charolais, pray that my pain may soon cease."

With a sob she snatches at my clenched hand, and holds it fast between her own; and as beneath that gentle pressure it relaxes, there falls from it a crumpled letter.

She stoops to pick it up, but before she can reach it, I have crushed the paper underfoot, though not before I see by her face she has marked the handwriting—a woman's.

"You must be faint with hunger," she says, gently, and presently brings me my breakfast, but does not linger a moment after setting it before me.

And as my misery grows, so does her sweetness. Each day it seems to me she grows kinder and more kind; unbidden, now, she

sometimes brings her work and sits beside me, wringing my heart to an agony that often makes my voice sound bitter in her ears and in my own.

Some day I shall understand why she is so sweet and gentle; why she seeks to prove to me that *my* harshness cannot touch *her* gratitude and affection; that this is indeed her leave-taking, for that she never means to return to us from the journey, now but a week or so distant, that she is to take.

All the sisters have left town; Florizel, too, has gone to her country place, but goes to Hetty in September.

One morning, three days before the date fixed for Green Sleeves' departure, the morning post brings me two letters.

They both bear a foreign post-mark. I open the least important first—it is from Siva. He returns in a fortnight, and goes to the Ulla-

thorne's in September for the shooting, where he is assured by Hetty he will see—Charolais.

I tear open the other letter. It is as I feared. Ullathorne is returning; will be back in time to receive his friends. "I thought," he adds, "that my exile might end now that I know she is going to be married to Siva; this is not quite what I had hoped, but the news has made me very happy. Hetty begged me not to mention it to him, so when I asked him for September, I said nothing about it. Perhaps you will now be inclined to judge me less harshly than you formerly did."

The letter falls from my hands — he is coming back, and beneath his very roof he will find, loving him more passionately than ever,—Green Sleeves.

She must not go. Thank God that this letter has come in time; but how shall I stay her without re-opening those wounds that bled

so terribly beneath my clumsy touch the only time that I dared speak of him to her?

I find my opportunity in the evening, when I call her to me, and she comes. Her eyes never fear to meet mine now; in them is a steadfast strength that shines down all thought of self, and her affection for me has assumed so protective a character as some times to provoke from me the smile that is akin to a tear

My haggard looks are mainly responsible for this gentle solicitude; no woman can bear the sight of a man's outward suffering.

"Green Sleeves," I say, as she sits down beside me, "I have some news for you. Guess."

"Anak is coming back?" she cries, quickly. "I should like to see him once more before I went away, for——" She stops abruptly.

"Can you think of no one else?" I say,

watching her keenly; "no one that you would be more glad to see than Anak?"

"No," she says; "there is nobody."

"Not even Ullathorne?"

"Is *he* coming?" she cries, clapping her hands. "O! I am so glad; and won't Hetty be delighted?"

"Hetty?" I repeat, mechanically, something in her face, her voice, bringing it suddenly home to me that here I have made another terrible, gigantic *mistake.*

"It will be twice as pleasant with him at home," she goes on gaily; "and, perhaps, *you* will come down for a week's shooting? espepecially," she adds, "as Lady Florizel will be there."

"You will go now that he has returned?" I cry. (It is impossible, *impossible* that I should be mistaken.)

"Why not?" she says, looking at me in

wonder; "we are old friends—the best of friends—and I shall be *rejoiced* to see him once more. It was a great trouble to me when he went away," she goes on, wistfully, "and I could never think how it was possible that you and he should find anything to quarrel about; but, perhaps, you did not, after all."

"You never guessed why he went?" I say, quietly, "or knew of any reason why he should go?"

"No; never. Dick, Dick, *what* is it?"

She looks at me in wonder; truth is dawning on my eyes at last—truth that is even more terrible than the evil that I had feared.

"Green Sleeves," I cry, hoarsely, "if it is not Ullathorne that you have loved all these years, *who* is it?"

"*Ullathorne!*" The name leaves her lips in a cry of horror. For a moment, she faces me

with a passion of outraged pride, of boundless amazement in her brown eyes; then she covers her face with her hands, and I see the burning colour leap into it like a flame.

"O!" she cries, "how could you have such a vile opinion of him, and of me—he the truest, best friend, who never dreamed, never *thought* of such a thing . . . Hetty's *husband* —and *I* . . . how could you breathe the same air with me if you thought me guilty of such a *crime?*"

I do not answer her; I am stunned.

"And, pray," she cries, passionately, "did you tell *him* that I was in love with him? Did you send him away because you were afraid that I should *make love* to him?"

And still I do not answer her.

"If you did," she says, "it would be all the same"—a rosy blush spreads over her face—"for he knows the truth."

"What is the truth?" I cry; "for I will have it now, or never. Green Sleeves, is it *Anak?*"

The whirlwind in her face changes to a rainbow—the passion is swept away by a rueful smile, with a blush flitting through it.

"O! yes," she says, and her very voice is like a bit of broken-up sunshine and weeping blended, "of course—it is Anak!" and in a second has slipped passed me, and reached the door. But in a moment I have overtaken and caught her. For one fierce moment I snatch her to me, hungrily search her face, and find the truth, the whole truth in it; then I let her go, . . . and she leaves me the poorest, the richest, the most miserable man upon whom a precious unsought gift of love was ever poured out.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Yea, many there be that have run out of their wits for women; many also have perished, have erred, and sinned for women."

I CAME back to-night to find the house more silent than usual, and on my table there lay a letter.

"Good-bye," it says, "and good-bye, and God bless you. Think of your little Green Sleeves sometimes, and if she can get over being too fond of Anak, *she will.*"

O! Green Sleeves, you would win a smile from tragedy itself—do you think to deceive me in this ridiculous fashion? And yet you

have taken me in, and made me miserable on your account, besides losing me my best friend for the last four months; and now you possess the power to make me a hundredfold more wretched than I was before, on my own.

It is my last smile for many a long day, and is yielded up to thee, little one, for grim and dark closes in my life around me, blacker and blacker grow my fortunes now that the one gleam of light that brightened them is gone.

O! friend—friend, how have I wronged thee . . . is it too late, even now, to make reparation?

In his letter he gave an address that for a week would find him. Before I go to my bed to-night—not to sleep, but to toss, and writhe, and turn in paroxysms of bitter memories—I have written to him.

At the end of three days, as I sit alone, at the lowest ebb of despair, at enmity with my

God and self, I hear a step approaching that I should know. A moment later Ullathorne is before me. Life is not all bitterness that can give such a hand-clasp as this. As we stand face to face, that lump of stone that has stood to me for a heart for the past three days softens to flesh and blood. For one brief moment I ask myself what is the love of woman compared with friendship such as this?

Far on into the night we talk; and I know at last how, rather than betray Green Sleeves' secret, of which he had by accident become possessed, he had allowed me to think him guilty of the sin of winning her love.

"And you can keep *your* secret still," I say at parting; "you do not fear in daily and hourly companionship with her that you will reveal it?"

"I went abroad with the firm resolve to conquer that madness, and, please God, I

have done so. Hetty and I will turn over a new leaf"—he smiles faintly; "but anyway, as the child never has guessed, so she never *shall* guess, the truth. I must not ask you to come to us, old fellow?"

I shake my head.

"There is only one circumstance on earth that could bring me to your house at present."

"And if that should happen? From what you have told me I should say there was more than a chance."

"If it should happen—which it will not—you may expect me."

I am alone once more, but for my work. I throw myself into it madly, and envy the ploughman who, by arduous bodily labour during the day purchases that slumber at night which I, for all my toil, never obtain.

Pink May has gone to Devonshire on a visit; the boys are taking their summer holi-

day; the house in the evening is as silent as the grave.

"You're killing yourself, man," says Gilly, one day when I meet him, "and it's too soon. Wait till you've eaten your heart out as consulting man for twenty years, without earning bread and cheese, before you do that."

"Work never killed a man yet, Gilly."

"But worry slays its thousands," he mutters as he turns away, and, to myself, I add, "and drink its millions."

John James appears unexpectedly one day at hospital, and shakes his head at sight of me.

"Take a rest, Dick," he says; "a man can't enjoy success in his coffin."

"But he gets the very thing you are desiring me to seek," I say; and indeed in these days I vex my soul day and night with the old, old

query that no one yet has been able to answer, "Is life worth living?"

One night, wakening from a fitful slumber, the first that has visited my eyes for many days, the shame, the ruin, the utter failure of my life suddenly rises up before me with such appalling force and truth that I shrink back, blinded as by a lightning shaft from heaven. Breathless, aghast, I look on as the panorama of my life unfolds, and I see my actions, not as they have appeared in my own eyes, but as they *are*. I see myself as child, youth, and man, cursed by the arrogance that has ultimately wrecked me. I see myself pursuing the path of stubborn self-esteem, till suddenly assailed by a temptation that, in my pride, I had scorned to guard against, and that hurled me broken to earth. I see how from that fall I rose with undiminished pride, and again relying blindly on my own strength, rushed

into a danger that any other man would have seen and avoided; and no immediate mischief bringing home to me this second mistake, I have been able vaingloriously to pursue my way till the third and crowning blunder is consummated.

Pride—always pride—that forbade my recognizing my fleshly failings, and so undid me. I see it all now, my life as it is, my life as it might have been, had I looked to my footsteps, had I known myself. I have borne myself as superior to all around me; I have laid down the law of virtue as austerely as though I practised it to the uttermost; to Ullathorne I have displayed a severity that, with this new light on my conduct, strikes me as something grotesque; to Green Sleeves even I have been harsh to a degree that should have changed her affection for me into hatred.

I see it all now, and the punishment, against

which I have lately rebelled so fiercely, seems to me now a consequence natural and just.

The night wears on, but before me this pitiful fellow, this thing of pride and folly, this windbag of self-sufficiency and virtue, struts to and fro; though when I have learnt him through and through, his every trick, his weakness, his vanity, till I sicken at the sight, and marvel that others have not sickened too, he dies, and a new Dick, every whit as foolish, as ignorant, and as miserable rises in his stead.

But none will ever call him proud again, or find him as harsh to their failings as to his own; none need fear from one who has so justly earned his own contempt, a word that would seem to invest him with the right to despise others; and if he again attain to self-respect, it will not be at the sacrifice of a fellow creature.

* * * *

I woke but now out of such a slumber

as has not visited my eyes since boyhood, to find the mid-day sun streaming into my chamber, while on the threshold there lay—a letter. It was sealed with black, and bore a foreign postmark. By the morrow's sun I was in Paris.

CHAPTER XIV.

"He that dies pays all debts."

LLATHORNE says you are looking shockingly ill," writes Hetty, "and my advice to you is, come here for a month, get some shooting, settle affairs with Florizel, and decide once and for all to cut that *wretched profession.* I don't expect her for another few days, but, of course, you can come when you please. By the way, Siva is here; he and Charolais are always together, but as yet nothing definite is *announced.*"

I found this letter awaiting me, with half-a-

dozen others, on my return from Paris, a week ago, and it is not answered yet.

"Eh!" cried Ariel, when she opened the door to me, "is any of the family *dead*, sir?" and she pointed to my black hatband and gloves.

I had forgotten that questions would be asked at home. . . .

"A friend," I answered, as I passed her by; but my words rang false in my own ears, for something more and less than friend unto me was the dead thus outwardly mourned.

And within? Within all is freedom and light. As yet no human throb of ecstasy ruffles the wings of that superb tranquillity on which I rest; . . . when a man is taken off the rack, or released from some nameless torture, he does not rejoice—he rests awhile in a content compared with whose boundless ocean joy is as a puny, babbling rill.

In these first days I do not think; I do not take my new-found treasure in my hands, and look at it in this light, and that, or weigh it to see how much or how little of happiness it is worth to me. I am conscious only that the leper-stain is wiped from my soul; that the mistake which might have made my life a maimed one to the end has been cancelled by the hand of death, and that I am free (O! word of meaning to one whose fetters have eaten into his flesh), free as air.

Freedom! O! the taste of it between my lips. . . . I scarce dare to grasp it, to exult in it. . . . I put out my hand to touch it, trembling, and, with averted eyes, suffer not its full brightness to burst on me at once, lest it strike me blind.

But at the end of a week this clear, pure atmosphere has become second nature to me; with that impulse of unrest that, deeply rooted

in man's nature, ever impels him forward to unknown joys or ills, I cast behind me the calm of the gods, and feel stirring within me the hopes and fears of the mortal.

Hetty's letter, still unanswered, stares me in the face, and, as I read it for the second time, it comes upon me with a sudden, smart shock that I am free—to go to Florizel.

The time so passionately longed for, so profoundly despaired of, has come at last; but, that was *once*, and this is *now*.

She must be expecting me, every day she must be expecting me; yet, for another week, I thrust the thought from me. I say to myself that, after all these years, a little time more or less cannot signify; that I have not sucked out half the sweetness of my freedom yet; that I will enter into no new bondage, however gentle; and, with guilty yearning, my heart turns towards that other impossible happiness

that, were I without scruples, without honour, I might snatch at, and make my own.

Let me think: a clean, honourable life with a woman who will encourage, and bring forward the little that is good in me; who will never bring the worse half of my nature into play, and, consequently, cause it to starve and dwindle away—or a life purchased at the cost of another's misery, my own dishonour, of utter happiness, and self-pleasing?

I have forfeited my right to happiness—let it go; and *she*, she will soon forget, and some other man will, perhaps, make her happier than ever I could have done. Does some dim, unacknowledged hope float between this acquiescence in that which I desire not and my renunciation of that which I so passionately crave?

It is natural to us to deceive ourselves as we do others; so that, when at last I set out

for Y——, it is with one avowed purpose only in my mind, while of the hope that runs beside it I am no more actively conscious than is the hurrying river of the flowers that border its banks, as it hurries on to lose itself in the sea.

* * * *

"You have come too late," says Hetty, meeting me on the threshold; "Florizel left us yesterday; until this morning we had quite given up expecting you."

"There is some shooting left," says Ullathorne; "come and have a sherry and bitters before dinner, old fellow," and we go off together to his sanctum.

But when we have reached it, he puts his hands on my shoulders, and looks me in the face.

"Dick—free?"

"Thank God! *yes*."

"Don't be in a hurry to put on fresh shackles, old fellow; better be misunderstood than make a second mistake."

"She has been expecting me?"

"Yes; I fancy so."

"Ullathorne, where it is a question of honour——"

"But, perhaps, she has her notions of honour, too. Dick, I think I see happiness before you yet."

"Have Siva and Green Sleeves made up their minds?" I say, looking out of the window at the miles and miles of wooded country that stretch out beyond.

"They have agreed—to differ. He goes to-morrow, and I think is trying his luck for the last time to-day—look there."

I draw back, for at this moment the pair come slowly within sight. He is talking vehemently; she is swinging her hat by one string,

her face is flushed, her lovely dark eyes are full of trouble.

"I tell you, Charolais, he *wishes* it," I hear him say as they approach; "there is nothing on earth that he desires so much."

"And do you expect me to marry you because *somebody else* wishes it?" she cries, passionately, though I see how at his words she has gone pale as death. "When I marry —which will be *never*—it will be to please myself."

"O! Charolais!" he says, ruefully, "you are a little Irishwoman, and the Irish change their minds very often; perhaps your never will be some day, after all."

She looks up, sees me, and into her brown eyes there flashes such a joy as dizzies me.

"Mr. Dick!"

"Green Sleeves!"

We see but one another, the lookers-on are

forgotten; it is only when I turn to Siva a few moments later, that I become aware of the madness into which that cry, that look of hers have hurried me.

He greets me mechanically; he is as a man who has suddenly awakened from a dream.

"What are you all doing here?" says Hetty, suddenly swooping down on us. "Come into the drawing-room every one of you, and make yourselves agreeable for the half-hour before the dressing-bell rings."

But three of us only obey her behests; Siva disappearing until dinner is announced, and his fate, in the shape of a married flirt, is about making up her mind to walking down stairs without him.

CHAPTER XV.

" Green Sleves, now farewell! adieu!
God I pray to prosper thee!
For I am still thy lover true. . . ."

I LEFT the dancers behind me—eight couples in all—and came out on the terrace to think.

Through the open windows I see Green Sleeves in her

" Smock of silk both fair and white,
With gold embroidered gorgeously,"

advancing and receding before Ullathorne in the Lancers, while Siva gloomily watches her, making no pretence at conversation with his partner.

Hetty is growing stout, and regularly dances for an hour every night before going to bed, setting her face against lounges in the billiard-room, or the yawns that inevitably come before bedtime in the drawing-room.

The dance over, one or two couples come to the window and look abroad, but the air is chill, there is no light without, save what comes through the open window; they turn back, and I am left in solitude.

Once Ullathorne comes to look for me, but divining, perhaps, my wish to be alone, makes no great search, and goes in again.

It is barely ten o'clock yet. I see Hetty try to bring the smiles back to Siva's face; he puts his arm round her waist, and they waltz off together, she talking eagerly to him the while. His face brightens. Where is the young lover who will not believe in hope before circumstance?

A slender figure slips across the line that

divides the light from the darkness, and comes straight towards me. I forget that she cannot see me, and marvel what impulse brings her thus willingly to my side.

She sits down scarcely a hand's breadth from me; but, before a certain fierce struggle within myself is over, Siva has crossed the window and is after her.

Perhaps this is a favourite haunt of both, for he comes unhesitatingly to where she is, and before I can move or acquaint them of my presence, he has dashed into vehement speech.

"Charolais," he cries, "I cannot see you, but I can feel the silk of your dress, and I know you are there. You shall hear me, for the last time, to-night, and if your answer is still the same, then I will go away; and some day you will be sorry, for *I love you*, Charolais—and it is better to be satisfied with the

love that you can win, than to eat your heart out for that which you cannot get."

"I am grateful for your love," she says, gently, "but I do not want it—that is all."

"Charolais," he cries, bitterly, "I have your secret now, and he does not love you; his heart is bound up in Lady Florizel, after whom he came here to-day. And do you know that he follows her to-morrow?"

"I know it."

"He has loved her always, Charolais; he would have married her long ago but for an entanglement he got into abroad; and I suppose that is at an end, as he has evidently come here with the avowed purpose of asking her to be his wife."

"Why do you tell me all this?" she cries. "I have long known or guessed it; and it is nothing to you—or to me."

"Nothing to you?" he echoes; "and do you

not love him, Charolais? can you deny that you *love* him?"

"No," she says, in a very low voice, "it is no disgrace. You do not feel it a disgrace to love me, nor shall I ever feel it to be one that I have loved *him*. He does not know it," she goes on, with a sort of sob in her voice, "but even if he did, he is too noble to despise me for it."

"And what will you do, Charolais?" he says, sadly; "resign yourself to looking on always at their happiness? You are one of the family, they will cross your path at every step, and you will not have a chance of forgetting."

"No," she says, below her breath, "I shall not see their happiness. When I leave here it will not be to go home——" she ceases suddenly in her speech.

"Charolais," he cries, suspiciously, "what

is this that you think of doing? To go away from all who love you—to cast yourself alone on the world—is *that* what you propose?"

"No," she says, "it is to an old lady that I am going as companion, and she will take care of me; but, O!" she adds, "this is a great secret—to nobody in the world have I told it but you, and if you betray me I will never speak to you again as long as I live."

"So there is a chance of you speaking to me again?" he says, eagerly. "No, I will not betray you, Charolais; but you will tell me where you are going?"

"O! Lord Siva," she says, laughing in spite of herself, "what would the old lady say?"

"Advise you to marry me," he says, promptly. "After you've been married to me a year or so, you'll be just as fond of me as if you had married Dick."

"Should I?" she says, with an odd ring in

her voice; "it would be an experiment. I don't think I'll try it."

"I won't give up hope yet," he says, with a sudden brightness in his voice. "You'll so soon get tired of that sort of life, Charolais, and I'll find you out, never fear, however you may think to hide yourself."

"Siva!" calls Ullathorne in the distance.

"Coming. I shan't go to-morrow, Charolais; I shall stay and see what you are going to do. You can't possibly go to that old lady's without escort, you know."

She laughs as he goes away, but all at once it changes to bitter weeping. "O!" she cries, very low, "is my love *never* to be to me anything but a source of shame?"

"Green Sleeves!"

She starts up; I can almost hear her tremble; she stretches out her hand involuntarily, as though to search the darkness.

I make it prisoner, and draw her down to my side.

"Green Sleeves," I say, "I have a story to tell you. Spare me five minutes in which to hear it.

Her name was wrung from me by that helpless cry of shame. I had meant to go away with the truth unspoken, but now it burns within my heart, and on my lips, and will not be quenched by scruples.

"Child," I say, abruptly, "my tale is a short one; but when you have heard it, you will never need to be ashamed of your love again, save in bestowing it upon one so unworthy of the gift."

"It is a very old story," I say, after a pause; "it might be told without much variation of a hundred men as proud, as foolish, and as ignorant as he of whom I speak. He began life with some belief, considerable hope, and

an honourable ambition, that, though difficult of attainment, might yet be reckoned within his reach. But, looking ever forward, not inward, cursed by a pride that made all that he did seem good in his own eyes, he knew no more of his own nature than of a stranger's; and when assailed by a temptation that he had never believed it possible could touch him, he fell before it, and was degraded in his own eyes for ever.

"You will not understand this part of the story. God grant that you never may. He fell in love with a woman who had not one single attraction for him that had not formerly in other women excited his contempt, who roused all that was worst in him, and for a time so completely trampled his better nature under foot, that she seemed to have called another man into existence, a man who, in that brief delirium of headlong passion, committed

the crowning, the irreparable folly of—marrying her.

"His awakening was as rude as his fall had been sudden; his passion had barely shrivelled to the ashes of disgust, when he became aware, from her own lips, of how, if he was conscious of having made a fatal mistake in marrying her, she had only, as the dupe of circumstances, been betrayed into the folly of marrying *him*.

"Before their marriage he had been puzzled by certain words dropped in her talk. A week afterwards she told him, playfully, that all disguises might as well now end, for she knew him to be, not the plain tutor as whom he had passed himself off, but the man of title with whom he was travelling; and that, though the Lord Burleigh conceit was a very pretty one, it was time it should come to an end, and she be installed in her rights.

"He thought her mad, till he found how the young fellow with whom he had been travelling had, indeed, for the sake of sport, convinced the girl and her mother that *he* was the tutor, though the other, from eccentric motives, desired to pass himself off as such; and before the jester could undeceive them, or stay the joke from turning to bitter earnest, he was recalled to England by a summons to his father's death-bed.

"The man whose story I am telling you found the discovery of the woman's interested motives as nothing, compared with the consciousness of his own degradation. Her railings, when she found herself tied for life to one who could give her neither luxuries, wealth, nor position, her passionate regrets at the miserable market her splendid beauty had found, passed him by; the condemnation of his own soul drowned all voices from without.

"He despised himself too profoundly to feel or express one spark of contempt for *her*. She wondered, at last, and grew still. Had he been a rich man, her love, such as it was, might have been given to him. As it was, she hated him for being what he was, and raised no objections when he told her he would provide for her living in Paris (where he had married her) with her mother. And then he left her—she knowing nothing of him beyond his name—leaving a banker's address, under cover to whom she might write to him, if necessary.

"There had been another influence in this man's life; previous to his debasement—an influence so good and strong as almost to have touched love; and to this he now turned, as a man may from the lurid fires that have scorched and maimed him, to the clear, pure starlight of a world far above him. In those

days this woman seemed to him the one woman on earth who could have made him happy; by contrast with that other, she became adorable. Had she possessed the power to awaken in him one throb of passion, he would have shunned her; but in that bright, clear atmosphere he gradually regained possession of his old self, and looked back on that fierce interregnum of passion as a dream.

"She soothed, cheered, *raised* him, little by little restored the man's self-respect, and set him on his feet again, and thus, knowing all the story—for he had no secrets from her—and for pure love, *for his sake*, set herself aside, and was content so long as she might serve him."

"God bless her," cries Green Sleeves, her hand tightening on mine; "it was noble—it was *grand* of her."

"He said to himself then, 'If ever it pleases

God to lift this accursed yoke from my shoulders, I will seek this one pure, faithful woman, and by a life's devotion seek to repay her in some small measure for what she has done for *me.*' For to what might not the man have sunk — his self-esteem gone, his future destroyed at a blow—had not this woman stood by his side?

"And yet, when he left her, fortified and strengthened, to take his part in the battle of life, her goodness, her nobility had not made any stronger claim on his *heart* than two sweet brown eyes were able to scatter . . . hitherto the better half of his nature, then the worse half had been called into play, but his heart had been reached by neither, and remained untouched.

"Something crept into it, and made fast its dwelling there—a something that had no name. Love has no name; he is *he,* and you

are *you*: and one day he awoke to the knowledge that at length he *loved* one who satisfied his mind, soul, and fancy, yet from whom he was divided by circumstances as utterly as though she were dead. He was married to one woman, he was bound in honour to a second, and the woman he loved had no love to give him—or so he thought then; but later, when about to send her away from him, he discovered that the love he had believed she had given to another was *his*, had been his from the beginning.

"What should he do with this gift—so sweet and precious, that he dared not take? In the midst of the wild tumult of joy, despair, longing, and renunciation that raged in his breast, came news that almost struck him blind in the reading—his wife had died suddenly, and he was—free.

"Free . . . to go to the woman he loved?

No, honour and gratitude alike pointed to the woman who had been his good angel; who had saved him from himself, and who —loved him.

"Tell me, Green Sleeves," I cry, "could he do any other? could he make her so base a return after all those years as to discard her now that he had a chance of proving his gratitude?"

"No," cries Green Sleeves, swiftly, "his honour compelled him; he would be unworthy of any woman's love if he could abandon one who had so nobly stood by him, and—and I think he could not choose but be happy with such a woman as that, and . . . in time he would forget the other."

"And that is all the story. Child, do you think *she* would ever forget?"

"Never."

She has risen. As she stands beside me, I

can smell the roses she wears in her bosom . . . a mad, wild yearning overcomes me, and suddenly winding my arms around her, draw the little face, all wet with tears, down to mine.

"Kiss me once, Green Sleeves, my heart, for the first, last time," I cry, hoarsely, and with a sob she lays her arms about my neck, for a second, a little velvet mouth falls soft as a flower on my lips, then she has torn herself out of my arms; I am alone.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky,
That dost not bite so nigh
As benefits forgot:
Though thou the waters warp,
Thy sting is not so sharp
As friend remembered not."

I HAVE given Florizel no warning my coming. When I reach the castle, after traversing the half-dozen miles of park by which it is surrounded, on foot (for I wanted to think, to find words somewhat less bold than the

"Madam, I am come to woo,
Marriage I must have of you"

of the old ballad, in which to make my suit) I find her not at home.

"I think her ladyship is somewhere in the Home Park, sir," says the butler; and thither I go in search of her.

Who could walk through such a scene as this, and believe Feuerbach's wretched theory, that God exists only in our own minds? Mohammed's thoughts sped truer when, in answer to those who besought him to perform miracles, he pointed to those never ending ones wrought by an unseen hand— the royal progress of the seasons, the constant renewal of life that no human hand has ever accomplished; and Confucius went further when, entreated by a foolish disciple to speak something that might be written down, he exclaimed, "Does heaven speak? The four seasons pursue their courses, and all things are continually being produced; but does Heaven say anything?"

The meanest herb finds a place in that

"sum of things for ever speaking" that is the immortal vocabulary of God, and while we have His bow in the heavens, His presence in the storm, we ask no words uttered in the language of mortals.

How lovely, how vast are the solitudes through which I pass on my way to Florizel! Sieviking shrivels to a handful of dust beside this magnificent stretch of land, and beneath these giant trees there is almost the same sensation of loneliness, of freedom, as one experiences on a boundless seashore.

By merest chance I come upon her at last, sitting under a tree; and the grass telling no tales, I have time to note her weary air, her pallor, as with listless eyes she looks out at the lands that call her mistress.

Perhaps my life will not have heen all a mistake, if in it I can bring happiness to one human being. . . . my own wretchedness

grows less when I see the colour that leaps to her cheek, as I reach her side.

"Dick!" she cries, starting up, and then my face telling her on what errand I have come, she grows paler than at first, and asks question after question about the Ullathornes and those at home.

But I put all her questions by, only desiring to place myself beyond the reach of that wild and desperate longing that burns like fever in my veins, and, taking her hand in mine, prefer my suit in language plain as ever man used yet.

"Florizel, will you be my wife?"

"No, Dick—never."

For a moment I look at her, stunned—beyond her, heaven's gate seems to open, and I to have no power to look within it; then the vision fades, and I see only in the brave face before me a renunciation stronger even than the love in its every line.

"O! Dick," she cries, with quivering lips, "had you so mean an opinion of me as to think I should say *yes*?"

"I would have tried to make you happy, Florizel," I cry; "with all my heart and soul I would have tried—and are you sure that I should not have succeeded?"

"And do you think," she says, sadly, "that I, whom you have had no cause to think of save with liking, would stoop to become an object of effort, of disgust to you? Be to you simply the obstacle who came between you and your life's happiness? I love you too well, I value your liking for me too well, to sink to that. . . ."

"Florizel," I cry, struck to the very soul by her words, "what is there in such a wretch as I to win from you such a love as this? Madman, fool that I was not to be able to return it in kind. . . ."

"Dick," she says, quickly, "do not praise me overmuch, for I have not conquered myself without many a fall and stumble—I have been jealous of your Green Sleeves, I have hated her; and when you wrote me the news of your wife's death, and I knew the happiness that was in store for *her*"—she covers her face with her hands—"if you had seen me then, Dick, you would never have thought me *good* again."

"You will always be the best, the noblest woman on earth to me," I cry, forgetting how but last night Green Sleeves said "Go," when, had she said "Stay," I might have forfeited honour to win her.

We are moving towards the castle now; all at once Florizel turns to me, laughter and tears struggling for the mastery in her grey eyes.

"O! Dick, what will Bell and Hetty say?"

do not answer her; I can think neither

of them nor Green Sleeves at this moment, Florizel herself fills all my thoughts.

"Poor little Charolais," she says, "I am afraid she will have rather a bad time of it with them when you go back to claim her."

"I shall not go—yet," I say. "O! Florizel, how can you think it possible?"

"I wonder how long it will be before you are hungry for a sight of those brown eyes?" she says, a little bitterly; "don't, Dick, sing my virtues to her, or she will hate me, and I want to be friends with the child, else I shall never see you, and I won't give up our friendship for any wife or sweetheart living."

"You don't know her, Florizel, indeed; and when she owes her life's happiness to you, how can she help loving you?"

"I do not want her love," cries Florizel, hastily. "I beg your pardon, but you don't understand woman; Charolais and I will never

love one another, but we may be good friends for all that, Dick."

"I hope so."

"You are quite sure *she* is really dead?"

"Quite sure."

"You saw her?"

"No, she had been buried the day before I arrived in Paris. I saw the doctor, and received the certificate of death."

"And the mother?"

"Pitied her . . . she seemed stupified by grief."

We have reached the entrance to the castle, above which the dragon, emblem of the powerful family of Fitzalan, rears his head, and I pause beneath him to say farewell to the last descendant of the ancient house.

"You are going back to Y—— to-night?" she says, colouring.

"No, to the inn to-night. To-morrow——"

"To-morrow," she says, with a sudden change in her voice; "come here—to dinner. Will you promise?"

"May I not come up in the morning?"

"No; you shall have a day's shooting. I will send the head gamekeeper round to you first thing."

"I shall shoot myself," I say, puzzled at her commands; I have not handled a gun for years, and——"

"There, good-bye," she says, giving me her hand; "I dine at eight, but if you like you may come at seven—if you have not shot yourself meantime in mistake for a partridge."

* * * * *

"Lady Florizel's compliments, sir," says the butler, as he takes my hat from me, "and she is sorry she will not be able to see you till dinner time, but she is particularly engaged.

And will you mind waiting for her in the White Drawing-room?"

He leads the way, and I follow him through half-a-dozen rooms, thinking how lonely poor Florizel must be in the midst of all this splendour, and find myself at last in a room smaller than the rest, in which he leaves me.

But the room is tenanted already—some one is sitting with her back to me in a big arm-chair drawn close to the window — some one whose little dark head somehow puts me in mind of Green Sleeves, and as I advance this somebody turns, and I see her, my love, my dear; and in another moment her heart is beating against mine, and for weal and woe my Lady Green Sleeves is my very own at last.

BOOK IV.

CHAPTER I.

"O! bow my lady in satin and silk,
Bowing down, bowing down,
And wash my son in the morning milk!
And aye the birks a' bowing."

HAVE you ever watched a young mother go upstairs to her baby? The first few steps she goes sedately, then her pace quickens, then, when she hears his voice in the distance, she begins to run, finally she arrives full gallop, but with all her speed her heart has

outrun her body, and in imagination she has caught him in her arms long before she has reached him. And then she hugs him all up together to her breast, as though she held all the world—so little, so great—in that tender compass; and I don't believe any love of man, with its mingled bitter and its sweet, touches so divine a rapture as this.

Myself unseen, I have been watching such a pantomime, and now I stand back to see My Lady Green Sleeves, and her boy, come dancing down the shallow oaken stairs—he perched astride on her shoulders, with the little yellow head,

"Running over with curls,"

surmounting her dark one, his dimpled arms held aloft by her either hand, while he is talking to her in that tender child-language that surely is the purest note in the whole gamut of earthly sound.

I lie in wait for the pair, and as they come by, I snatch them to my heart, but quick as a sunbeam Green Sleeves has escaped me, and is through the open window before the touch of her has well left my fingers.

I catch them between two of the long poplar shadows that lie across the lawn.

"O! Green Sleeves," I cry, "I never would have brought you here, if I had known you would get so outrageously saucy!"

"I am so happy," she says, rubbing her forehead against my neck, "and I think it gets up into my head—do you know I was strongly tempted to turn a somersault over a haycock to-day when the Squiffer did? And I don't think it would have mattered much if I *had*, for all the haymakers are firmly convinced that Pink May is your wife, not me."

"Dear old soul," I say, laughing, and looking across to where, in a distant field, an um-

brella attests to the care our aunt still takes of her complexion; "but indeed, Green Sleeves, such conduct as running races with the boys, and arriving out of breath to receive visitors, climbing trees of a Sunday afternoon, and going to church with a big strawberry stain on your white gown, is *not* becoming behaviour in a young matron."

"O!" says Green Sleeves, who has put her treasure down on the grass, and is thus able to give me a divided attention, "it is all very fine for you to talk—you see you are getting old, Dick, but *we* are young."

"Mrs. Sieviking," I say, gravely, "I will buy you a book that will teach you your duty to your husband. And to think that you were once a modest, obliging, well-behaved little creature, who called me 'Mister!'"

"That was before I found you out," she

says, nodding. "It does alter one's opinion of a person wonderfully—to marry him!"

"Green Sleeves, after all, I don't believe you love me, particularly."

"No; I have got so used to you. After all, 'a bird in the bush is worth two in the hand.' . . . I love you dearly when you are away from me. O! Dick, isn't he *beautiful?* And not in the least like me," she adds, proudly, as her bright-eyed boy pulls himself up to her knee, and drums upon it with his little fat hands.

"He is certainly the first man child of any consequence that was ever born," I say, gravely, "though there may have been one or two mothers who thought differently."

"There *couldn't* have been one like this," she says, ineffably, "and you may kiss him, if you like, Dick."

"I wonder why, for the first three or four

years of a child's life, his mother is everything, his father simply a contemptible person?" I say, not availing myself of her gracious permission.

"Because he *is*," says Green Sleeves, picking up her treasure with an air of dignity; and how you ever came to be the father of such a little *angel*, I'm sure I can't imagine, and mother will kiss you, if he won't;" and then there is such a piece of fooling between this pretty pair as might go on for ever, did she not, as an after-thought, remember me, and give me a kiss—only one, but given so sweetly, with a tender arm round my neck, and one of those rare looks from her brown eyes that tell me how, for all that she seems wrapped up in the child, the first place in her heart is yet mine.

"Dick," she says, softly, as he struggles down again to the grass at our feet, "don't you

think we are almost too happy—do you think it will last?"

Her question startles me . . . I had thought her to have forgotten, she has seemed so careless in her happiness . . . and God is merciful in that he makes the memory of joy so infinitely keener than that of pain, we are able to count up our joys, and thread them as pearls on the string of memory, so that not one of them be lost; but who recalls as vividly the heart thrusts of which he has bled?

"What has put that idea into your head?" I say, quickly.

"Because I'm growing too *used* to being happy. I'm not grateful enough, but take it all as a matter of course, and I've noticed people always get a good waking up, and *humbling* when they're like that."

"We shall have a terrific quarrel, Green Sleeves," I say, jestingly, "and part for ever—

to rush into each other's arms half-an-hour afterwards."

"Or you will discover, some day, that you made a mistake, and that Lady Florizel would have suited you much better than I do."

"Of one thing I am very certain," I say, pinching her cheek; "that she would never have preferred a little urchin like *that* to her lord and master."

"I don't think that I prefer him, really," says Green Sleeves, meditatively; "but, to tell you a secret, it *is* a struggle, sometimes, to know which of you to say first in my prayers."

"And, supposing you had to choose between us, Green Sleeves, what then?"

She snatches the boy to her heart, looks at him, at me.

"O! Dick," she says; "he is *you*, you know!"

"A year ago," I say, jealously, "you could not have borne for me to leave you for days together, as I do now. You would have been restless and miserable, till I was at your side again; but *now*——"

"Then," she says, looking round at the poplar-shaded lawn, the veritable thickets of roses that lavish their perfume on the air in a thousand subtle scents, "we had not Sieviking!"

For this is Sieviking, and it is mine. Mine, while I am yet young, and able to enjoy it; mine, without long toil and labour, yet none the less sweet to me for that. When one is happy, one takes all good gifts naturally, not fighting against them; and this gift of Sieviking, dropped unexpectedly by Fortune into my lap, is the very crown and completion of my content.

A year ago, Mr. Menzies' health suddenly

failed; he was ordered abroad indefinitely, and Sieviking once more came into the market.

It was instantly bought (though by whom we could not ascertain), but never occupied; and when, two months ago, I received a letter informing me that by the death of my godfather in Calcutta I was entitled to fifteen thousand pounds, it was surely an odd coincidence that, almost simultaneously, a London agent should inform me how he was instructed to offer Sieviking for sale by private contract, at little more than half the sum for which we had sold it.

Perhaps it was a mad thing to do, for I was a poor man yet, with means quite inadequate to keeping up the place properly; but I could not resist the temptation, and the close, confined London life was telling on Green Sleeves and the child, or so I thought; and, one day,

with a vague, delirious wonder, I found myself beneath the very tree where I had sworn to win the old home back, and knew, that though not earned by the sweat of my brow, it was yet by no dishonourable means, *mine.*

The first rapture of possession has not left me yet. I can still hail as a new discovery each old, well-remembered haunt, and renew my youth in a tree with a broken bough here, in initials cut deep in the bark there, the very flower-beds, with their unaltered shapes, steal on my sight as memories over the heart of a dreamer, and lull me to a happy repose.

The house, too, is almost unchanged; the furniture is as we left it, and the school-room, to which we have restored the battered old relics we had removed to town, looks as though not a day had passed since we bade it farewell.

Already many of the old voices have echoed through it; the boys have raced and torn hither and thither, intoxicated with joy. Jill has been down for a couple of weeks, and comes again shortly; the Ullathornes are coming in a month's time for a few days. Of Anak's return there is at present no chance. Now that there is real work to do, he is not likely to desert his post; but we look to having him back safe and sound, some day. And Florizel is coming by-and-by. Over the perfections of her god-son, she and Green Sleeves have become warm friends. For the present, my own life must be pretty equally divided between town and country; but, in less than a year, I look to settling down here for good, in the modest character of apothecary to my own village.

"Here are the spoons," cries the Squiffer, bursting round a corner on us; "why, we've

been looking for you everywhere; Pink May has got tea all ready in the hay field, and kissing will keep, but strawberries and cream *won't.*"

CHAPTER II.

"O! gentle wind that bloweth south
From where my love repaireth,
Convey a kiss from *her* dear mouth,
And tell me how *she* fareth."

I LEFT home so early this morning that I would not waken my wife, who lay with her boy in her arms in the midst of the dancing lights and shadows, with the first morning song of the birds without, woven through them, and all day I have kept that picture in my mind, and with my thoughts I have followed her through every hour.

Now she will be in the garden among

the roses, anon in the hay-field with the boys; the strawberry beds are certain of her presence early in the afternoon, and at night-fall, when her child sleeps, I know that all her heart will be with me.

Blow, o' west wind, blow. Blow to my darling all tender thoughts, all passionate desires; whisper in her ear secret of my heart, and bring me to her memory in the scent of every flower she touches, with every breath she draws, nor let me lapse one moment longer out of her thoughts than I permit her to escape out of mine. I am always restless away from her, but to-night my unrest has an element of fear in it, as though some one sought to snatch my treasure from me, and once I awaken struggling desperately with some unknown adversary, whose features seem to resolve themselves into those of Ullathorne.

I rise unrefreshed at daybreak, and can settle

to nothing till the morning post comes in and brings me a letter.

It holds great news—the child has cut a tooth, the Chancellor of the Exchequer has called and been sent empty away, the strawberries are nearly over, and she loves me dearly, dearly, *dearly.*

It is not often that she gives me so generous a peep into her heart . . . with Green Sleeves there always seems a little more to give, a little more to be won; perhaps she fears to tell me all lest she should be left with nothing more to tell.

And do I love her? I thought I loved her when our lives seemed divided for ever, and again I thought I could love her no better when she had been a year my wife, but now I can look back on those days, and say that it was not love compared with the passionate tenderness I feel for her now.

Our love has been often

> "Ruffled by those cataracts and breaks,
> That humour interposed too often makes."

Green Sleeves has a temper, and so have I, and more than once she has announced, in tones of the deepest conviction, that she is perfectly certain she will some day *hit* me, but we have borne each other no malice for the bitter words spoken in our haste, and hitherto have utterly sufficed to one another.

And this, I take it, is the true essence of love, for two people to find in each other that which the whole world beside does not furnish to them: to see faults, to be angry with themselves for loving so desperately that which they know to come so short of their ideal, and yet not even to wish them to be different.

Florizel's perfections would probably sit very ill on Green Sleeves' charms, but where one loves, a virtue is as likely to be found

hiding in a dimple as exercising itself laboriously in daily practise, while a trick of manner secures to its owner the consideration only purchased by another at painful self-sacrifice.

It is curious that women should feel so much more generously to an unworthy rival than a noble one. I think Green Sleeves has even now scarcely got over her jealousy of Florizel, and that the splendid conduct of the latter aroused in her a profound admiration that accentuated this feeling. Explain the riddle, ye women, if you can.

Nevertheless it is to Florizel, with my thoughts full of Green Sleeves, that, my day's work done, I am now on my way, and it is with a feeling of sharp disappointment that, on reaching her door, I am told she is out of town, and does not return till to-morrow.

I am in one of those moods when a man

longs for the society of someone in whose society he finds pleasure—when, like David, his spirit needs to be soothed into rest, and when, if no one is by to calm him, he is likely to be hurried into some scene of excitement or folly that at any other time he would abhor.

There is a fever in my veins that grows with every hour; were I superstitious, I should say that some baleful influence was upon me, that some great evil menaced me to-night, and the feeling at last becomes so strong that I go to a telegraph office, and send a message to Pink May asking if all are safe and well at Sieviking.

I wait for the answer, and cannot forbear a smile when I receive it. "All is Well." The capital W almost restores my spirits; I eat my solitary dinner with moderate appetite and go back to my books with the intention of doing a hard evening's work.

But the mischief in my blood will not be exorcised thus. Severe bodily exertion that tired me out might quiet me; I shut my book, and go forth into the night.

How different this to that one twenty-four hours ago, of which the star-spangled canopy above was but one of the many beautiful portions that went to make up that whole which we call night . . . when the sense of scent, the sense of hearing, and the still more perfect consciousness of the veiled beauty around, made the hour one of unutterable sweetness and rest.

May that instinct which carries our bodies to an accustomed haunt while our minds are far away, be supposed to dwell in the feet or in the memory? Wherever it may locate itself, it guides me to the Ullathornes' door, plants me on the doorstep, and even rings the bell for me before I am at all aware of

the liberty one half of myself is taking with the other.

"My master is in Paris, sir; my mistress is dining out," says the butler, in answer to my inquiries. I do not know, as I turn away, how, if my sister had chanced to be at home to-night, Fate might yet have passed me by, or at any rate have permitted to me a few more months or years of happiness.

With my restlessness still unsubdued, I pursue my way, and presently come to the open doors of a theatre, whence a few people are issuing—a great many going in.

Obeying a sudden impulse, I enter, and ask for a ticket; perhaps this mimic show will fix my attention, and distract my thoughts from myself.

The man looks up carelessly.

"Every seat is taken."

A sudden rage fires me. Am I to fail in

setting my foot in every place to which I have sought to gain entrance to-night?

A shabby-looking man comes hurrying up, and holds out his ticket—a dress-circle one—to be checked.

"The piece is three-quarters done," he mutters; "but better late than never."

I follow, and touch him on the shoulder.

"I will give you a guinea for that ticket," I say, and I hold out my hand with the money in it.

He looks at it longingly, then shakes his head.

"I daren't," he says; "I'm courting her, and she's got a temper—she'd never forgive me if I didn't turn up; and there's another young man as has got her ear at this very moment."

And he stumps down the passage, and out of sight.

Once more I go out into the streets, at length to meet the fate that three times over to-night I have unconsciously tried to elude.

CHAPTER III.

"Out, out, damned spot!"

CAME home unexpectedly to-night, and meeting no one by the way, gained the parlour, and dared to breathe.

The room was empty, but on the leather chair by the fire-place were set out in great state two shabby little shoes. How came they there so orderly? As I look down on them, a ripple of laughter from the garden without sends a shiver through me, and past the open window flits Green Sleeves, with her

boy on her shoulder, talking to him, as she comes, of *me*.

"Where are his shoes?" I hear her say, as she crosses the hall, and I shrink back into the shadow as the parlour door is pushed open, and she comes in. Her eyes are dazzled by the sunshine without; the child perceives me first, and, holding out his arms, cries, "Papa! papa!" I see her face turn rosy red, a warm love-light leaps into the brown eyes; she is at my side in a moment, but not in my arms; it is only by a supreme effort of will that I contrive to say—

"You see I have come home earlier than usual, Green Sleeves."

"You are ill?" she cries quickly, as she puts down the child. She leads me to the arm-chair, and draws me down to it. "O! Dick, your head is so hot"—she lays a cool little hand on it—"and you are so pale. I

think you must have had a slight sun-stroke, darling."

"Yes, a stroke," I say, leaning my forehead against her bosom. "Send the child away, Green Sleeves; I want you, only you."

When he has gone, I take her in my arms. Some of the raging fever in brow and heart is stilled, as I hold her thus. We are alive; we are together. Thought refuses to travel farther, and shame holds back the goad with which but now he stabbed me through and through.

Looking up, I see in a distant glass our two heads reflected. Thank God that hers is pressed downwards, and that she cannot see mine. To-morrow she will wonder, perhaps, how so much grey comes to be mingled with its yellow; but, to-night—yes, to-night, she shall see no change.

"It has seemed such a long week," she says,

gently; "I think I will go back with you on Monday. After all, Sieviking is not *you*."

"No; you must stay here. Green Sleeves, we have been happy?"

"Yes."

"We have quarrelled sometimes; we have been jealous; but we have *loved* one another?"

"We have; we *do*," she cries, clinging to me with a kind of fear. "And shall we not *always*, Dick?"

"Bad tempered, conceited, selfish, yet he has loved you, Green Sleeves; he has *loved* you,—whatever may come after, always remember that."

I strain her in my arms so fiercely that she has no breath, only a kiss with which to answer me—a kiss to which my lips make no more response than if they had been of wood.

I set her down, I take her face fast between

my two hands, and read its every line; then I put her from me resolutely, and she stands alone.

"Do not come with me, little one," I say, "I am going for a walk, and I may be late; don't even wait supper for me."

I go out into the garden, and she does not follow me. I am free to enjoy the charms of such a night as that of which I was thinking something close on a week ago in town. Here are all the spots in which I took so keen a delight as being mine—and they are mine still. O! thank God that the guilt of the hand that holds them, has not power to wither one green leaf, or wipe out one wavering line of beauty; that Nature reflects but our happy moods, not our miserable ones.

It is quite dark when at length I stand beneath the tree where I made my boyish vow, and thought life could give me no greater joy

than the possession of the old home. To-night I can look back to that day, and reckon that lad supremely happy, compared with the man who stands beneath its boughs to-night. For he suffered without sin; but this poor wretch has taken home guilt to his bosom, deception to his tongue, and must henceforth act, speak, and look, an incarnate Lie, than which there is nothing more hateful upon God's earth.

The tragedy has but just commenced; there is time yet in which to tear off the mask, to speak the truth; and, though hurled out of my Paradise, to know myself *honest*, save for one slip. Shall I go into the peaceful rooms of yonder home, and, blaring out my secret, bid happiness begone, and call upon all that I love best to arise and curse me?

As a thief who each moment dreads to find an eye turned upon him, I approach the

lighted window, and, merged in the darkness without, look within.

The table is spread for the evening meal; all the simple delicacies preferred by the master of the house set out with a care that speaks of loving memory and thought.

Pink May nodding over her knitting in a corner; the boys casting wistful glances at the clock, and trying to rouse my Lady Green Sleeves, who sits in the easy chair, pale, with something in her face that irresistibly brings to my mind those days in Picotee Lane when we loved one another by stealth, believing our lives to be for ever divided.

I think she has changed her gown, and I am sure she had not a ribbon in her hair when I came home. . . .

Little wife, little mother, with whom the most sacred memories of life are entwined, shall I leave thee now before my sin has de-

graded thee, or by flowery paths pursue my miserable road to dishonour?

The question is undecided when I enter the room abruptly, and, dazzled by the light, shrink from it, and cover up my eyes.

That moment decides my fate.

Green Sleeves comes to my side, puts her tender arms about me, as though in support, and leads me to a seat.

"Poor old boy," says Solomon; "he's knocked up by the heat, and no wonder—I nearly got a stroke over that last load of hay myself; but there's nothing better for anything of that sort than a good supper."

"Dear boy," says Pink May, "if *only* you would recollect to put a cabbage leaf in your hat every day."

I rouse myself with a violent effort, and lead Green Sleeves to the table.

"I see you have my favourite dish for me,

aunt," I say, as we sit down, and I take a little on my plate, and make a pretence of eating it.

"Dick's off his feed," says the Squiffer, "and no wonder — after a week of it in town. Now I shouldn't wonder," he goes on gloomily, "if desk work doesn't make *me* consumptive after a bit, and compel me to get country employment. Couldn't you take me on as bailiff, Dick?"

"I might—if I went away. Green Sleeves, would you like to go abroad for some months, and at once?"

"Would *you* like to go, dear?" she says, looking startled; "if so, of course I would—and baby, too," she adds.

"No," I say, irritably, "we couldn't take the child; we should be moving from place to place all the time."

"Don't you worry, Charolais," says the Squiffer, eyeing me wrathfully; "*we'll* take

care of him if you go; he's very fond of Solomon and me, you know."

"Will you come with me without him?" I say, the misery in my heart making my voice harsh and bitter.

"Yes—if you wish it."

"No," I cry, smoothing her pretty head, "I will not separate you; it is all talk, child, but probably no one will go."

"Why should you," says Solomon, "just as you've got back to the old place, and with the Ullathornes coming in a fortnight too, and Jill later on?"

"They must not come," I exclaim, involuntarily; "they must be put off."

"Well!" says the Squiffer with open eyes, "I didn't know you were so inhospitable, Dick! What did you ask them for if you didn't want them?"

"Aunt Theodosia called to-day," says Solo-

mon. "Said she understood all the family were here, and politely wondered how we managed to feed them. Charolais, the Squiffer, and I happened to be running a race, and making a rather considerable noise. From the description we thought it must be the Chancellor—for we came in from the garden side of the house—and burst in on her in a row."

He goes off in a loud explosion, in which the Squiffer joins, then goes on again—

"She saluted us boys in a majestic manner, and then, pointing at Charolais, asked who that child was.

"'This is Mrs. Sieviking, ma'am, of Sieviking Court,' I said, leading her forward, and I thought the old woman would have had a fit."

"Charolais had been trying to climb a tree," says Solomon, gravely, "and her hair

never *will* lie flat, you know. Aunt Theodosia sat down on the Esterhazy brown, and gasped."

"She asked Charolais what fortune she had brought you!" says the Squiffer, attacking the cheese, "and I told her you had followed the old recipe for getting a good wife, viz., to look out for one whose dowry consisted solely of clean linen and a strict virtue, whereupon she said that though she had always known you *looked* a fool, that was another matter to proving yourself one."

"And I said," puts in the Squiffer, "that you had always been afraid of showing all your wit in her company for fear of catching her reflection."

"She went away in a rage at that," says Solomon, "remarking as she went, that she had never thought to see Sieviking Court given over to a parcel of school-boys and school-girls, with a popinjay to keep order."

"Popinjay, indeed!" says Pink May, drawing herself up; "all jealousy, my dears—some people prefer popinjays—to parrots."

We gather round the window; Green Sleeves brings my pipe, fills it, and sits as usual on my knee . . . it is outwardly just such an evening as many other peaceful ones passed by us here, and the boys' garrulous talk flows on till midnight.

But for me there is no sleep, no rest; all night I wander over hill and dale, and daybreak finds me many miles distant from Sievking; it is not till the place is awake that I return to it, and go upstairs.

The nursery door is open—but the mother is not there, the nurse, too, is absent, and the child all alone is standing up in his cot, looking like a little bird caught in its netting as he swings himself to and fro. I see his blue eyes peeping at me through the interstices, and

approaching, as God knows I had had no thought of doing, he holds up his innocent lips to me, and as I stoop, his solemn wondering look, as though he knew something was amiss, seems to pierce to my very soul, and bring to light the secret hidden there.

CHAPTER IV.

"And when ye walk in the kirk-yard,
And in your dress are seen,
There is nae lady that sees your face,
But wishes your grave were green."

NO, ma'am," says Suzel, entering, "I can *not* find Master Dick's shoes anywhere, but they were nearly worn out, and——"

She stops short at sight of me, and drops an amazed courtesy.

"Where is your mistress?" I inquire, as I pass out.

"I think she must be in the garden, sir, but I left her here a few moments ago."

I could tell the girl where those shoes are if I pleased, but they are shabby, they are old, they would soon be cast aside, and I—want them. The windows of our room are flung wide open, the peaceful, happy room in which she took such pride, and that is as white and pure as her own heart, and I the only blot in it.

Here are her favourite books, her little treasures, my likeness hung above her desk, another of her boy by my side, all the precious odds and ends of a young life whose possessions, save of love, have never been very valuable.

"You see, Dick," she said to me, when it was all done, and she had led me up with triumph to see it, "this is *home*, and where I put the things they'll stop, unless we lose Sieviking a second time."

But did you ever think, my Green Sleeves, how perhaps you might lose *Dick?*

I throw myself down on the cushions of the low window-sill, and groan aloud.

"Dick's lazy," I hear the Squiffer say below my window, "let's wake him up." And a guelder rose, heavy with dew, flies through the window and falls at my feet.

"He seemed out of sorts last night. I wonder if anything's bothering him?"

"Who or what is there that *can?*" says Solomon, who is apparently eating strawberries; "he's got Charolais, and Sieviking, and the youngster, a profession that suits him down to the ground, and enough money to live on comfortably, with youth and health to enjoy all the lot. Why, he hasn't a thing left to wish for on earth—'he's been lucky in *everything*'—I just wish I could change places with him, that's all."

Their voices recede, and at the same moment I hear that of Pink May's approach.

"No, indeed, dear Charolais, you are not looking yourself this morning. Dick, too—he struck me as quite *odd* last night."

"The heat has tried him," says a dull, mechanical voice, that I hardly recognise; "we will not wait breakfast for him any longer, auntie; perhaps he will prefer to rest another hour or two."

"And he such an early riser always, too," says Pink May, as they enter the house, "and all for want of a cabbage-leaf in his hat, I do believe!"

I did not expect Green Sleeves to seek me. I can understand the sensitive pride that forbids her doing so; moreover, she is one of those rare women in whom is not that invincible bias towards following anything that walks off in an opposite direction that seems implanted like an instinct in the average female breast.

Since our marriage the courtship has been all on my side; but then I have been *happy*, there has been nothing in me to call forth that self-sacrificing tenderness which any woman worthy of the name feels when the eager triumphant lover is transformed as now into the suffering dependent; all her pretty pomps and sovereignties, those dear supremacies of love by which I know her to set such store, will she cast them aside as baubles to remember only that I suffer, and that she loves me?

I pull myself together, suddenly aware of how my feet are tripping and stumbling on that path which, once having sworn to tread, I had thought I should find easy. Unless I wish all to know that which I would give my life to hide, I must lay down some fixed rules for my conduct, and abide by them, no matter how flesh and blood rebel, no matter that at every turn becomes deeper sunk in

deceit the soul that, however unworthy, was once honest.

"Here's Dick at last!" says the Squiffer, as ten minutes later I enter the parlour where they sit at breakfast.

"Dear boy," says aunt, standing on tip-toe, "you don't look much the better for your night's rest."

I may kiss *her* without a pang. I do so with all my heart, but to Green Sleeves I only give a touch on the shoulder as I pass.

"It's nearly ten o'clock," says Solomon; "but there's lots of time for church. Charolais has got a new bonnet, an offering to the prejudices of the congregation, who like married ladies to look *elderly*."

"I did not think it would suit you, my dear, this morning," says Pink May, "but now that you have got such a nice colour, it will be just your style."

I look up—yes, she has, indeed, a beautiful colour, but her eyes do not meet mine, and though she busies herself with my wants, it is without a word.

"Are you going to church, Dick?" says the Squiffer, coming in half-an-hour later, with Green Sleeves' parasol and prayer-book in his hand, himself clad in irreproachable broadcloth. "I hope so, because it looks more *respectable* to see the head of the family in his place, you know."

"And Pink May's best gown is a *one-er*," says Solomon, appreciatively, "five hundred and fifty steel buttons on the skirt alone, and they all clank as she walks up the aisle, every one."

"Not going to church, dear boy?" says that lady, entering. "What will Charolais say—and her new bonnet and all?"

I go upstairs, and find her standing before

her glass, her hands absolutely idle, lost in thought.

"Green Sleeves," I say, "are you ready?"

She starts violently, and then feigns to be searching for her gloves.

"Are you not coming?" she says.

"No. Here are your gloves."

"Thank you."

We go down-stairs together, and I stand at the door to see them depart.

Just as they are starting she looks up at me. "Good-bye, Dick," she says, simply, and holds up her mouth to mine.

"Good-bye, little one," I say, kissing her forehead. And yet—and yet—could one kiss from me harm those beautiful, innocent lips?

I must go back to town to-night—or, better still, this very hour, now that I have the strength. . . .

There are some days that hold a lifetime in

them—that pass we know not how, in which the changes even of the day are not marked by us, when we measure time by a look, a word, a heartbeat—and this is one of them.

Subtly woven in with the simple story of home life without, is the darkness of the tragedy within me, and to my life's end the peace and beauty of a Sabbath-day in the country will bring back with the vividness of life every hour and incident of this one—the first of absolute guilt that I have known.

I told them all at dinner that I should be compelled to return to town to-night; and when they had all, save one, loudly wondered, I added, that certain matters connected with my profession would probably compel my departure for Paris the following Saturday to the Monday, instead of coming to Sieviking, as usual.

By that time the Ullathornes will be here, and then—and then——

A criminal should pray rather that he may be deprived of the power of looking forward, than of that of looking back.

Somehow we all keep together through the day. Green Sleeves avoids me no more than do I her. We can speak to each other almost naturally, and the rest seem to observe nothing amiss.

The evening meal is over, and they are wishing me God-speed on my lonely walk of five miles upon which I have refused to be accompanied, when all at once I miss my Lady Green Sleeves.

"Where has she gone?" says Pink May, looking round in wonder.

Where should she have gone, save where every mother goes when her heart is heavy, to ease it on the lips of her child, to hug him to her breast, and, by mere human contact, to persuade herself that she is not utterly alone?

It is thus that I find her when I enter the nursery, her boy's head against her bosom, and, in the attitude of both, something so forlorn and pathetic as might bring to my eyes such tears as that man is indeed accursed who has occasion to shed.

She looks up as I approach her. O! Heavens, that look of hers should have power to pierce me thus!

"I am going now, Green Sleeves. Good night, and God bless you."

They look up at me together, these two solemn, beautiful young faces . . . and my blessing seems to die on my lips as a curse. What am I that I should bless such as these? Then I stoop down, and kiss them both . . . purified of passion, made sacred by *their* purity, shall sin be found in such a kiss as this?

I turn at the threshold to look back. The

child smiles, and waves his little hand to me in farewell; the mother has hidden her face upon his neck; the door closes; I have left her to bear her suffering alone.

CHAPTER V.

"Love is a familiar, love is a devil; there is no evil angel but love. Yet Samson was so tempted, and he had an excellent strength; yet was Solomon so seduced, and he had a very good wit."

ND when are you coming back?"

"The day after to-morrow."

"You're hiding something from me," says the woman, sullenly. "Take care that I don't get to the bottom of it. I believe you've got some sweetheart shut up somewhere."

"No—no sweetheart."

"And when shall I see you again?"

"At the usual time and place. Who was that went by?"

"A man. Are you ashamed to be seen speaking to me?"

"Good night. How cold the wind blows up from the river!"

"Kiss me—Richard?"

The voices cease; footsteps recede in opposite directions; the bridge is empty.

* * * *

I came home this afternoon to find that the boys and Hetty had already arrived, but that Ullathorne was detained in town, and would come by a later train. I had a long search for Green Sleeves, but found her at last, and she welcomed me with as much coldness and sweetness as though I were a stranger and a bidden guest.

We talked laboriously on our way back to the house, and were so polite that even our

misery scarcely prevented our laughing in each other's faces.

But I was able to note that a fortnight had changed her as years of ordinary life might not have been expected to do, and how she is but a shadow of the merry, happy creature who ran riot with the boys about the old home such a little while ago.

On the lawn we find Hetty under a tree, eating strawberries and cream, with the Squiffer in attendance. She offers me some, and I sit down beside her, while the Squiffer, with all the ardour of a young lover, escorts his adored playmate back to the house.

"What is the matter with Charolais?" says Hetty, looking after the pair; "I should scarcely have known her. And this is a love match," she goes on, shaking her head, "and love matches are *mistakes*."

"And what of yours, Hetty?"

"O! love is all very well when you have something at the *back* of it, and Ullathorne and I are very happy. I have never had cause for a moment's jealousy," she goes on, fanning herself placidly; "he never looks at anyone but me, and really does not know when I ask him, whether a woman is pretty or ugly—I have certainly been very fortunate in a husband."

The longer I live the more clearly I see that to be ignorant is the only sure recipe for happiness in this world, and that the cleverest person never discerns in the dullest a defect that the latter has not long ago discovered in him.

"Now, of course," she proceeds, "it is all very pretty and nice to marry your fancy, and buy back the old place; but, as a matter of taste, and for living in, I prefer Florizel's Castle, and in my opinion, and judging by

results, Florizel herself would have suited you a hundred times better than Charolais does."

"That is the sort of thing one must try beforehand to make sure of."

"And really, though to sit here and recollect everything by degrees is quite delightful, and gives one a novel sensation, it is rather a shock to see how it all seems to have *shrunk*. Could we ever have flattered ourselves that Sieviking was anything but a modest country house?"

"It has not altered to me."

"I told Ullathorne that it was quite an ancestral sort of dwelling—I'm not sure that I did not even promise him a moat—he will think I have been romancing. Dear me," she adds, in a tone of wonder, "what is that?"

An apologetic cough issues from a cluster of shrubs hard by. With many a bobbing

courtesy there sidles into view no less a personage than the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

"Which, begging of you to excuse the liberty," she says, hugging her reticule, and smiling in her most agreeable manner, "but I've ventured to call this morning to pay my respecks—if only for old acquaintance sake, Miss Hetty."

"Mrs. Ullathorne, if you please," says Hetty, with dignity.

"And which, indeed, Mrs. On-a-thorn," says the Chancellor, greedily eyeing Hetty's sumptuous length of train, "but I'm rejoiced to see how times has changed for you since the days when——"

"You can go," says Hetty, magnificently. "Good-day."

"And I can't do anything for you this morning, ma'am?" says the Chancellor, lin-

gering. "There must be a sight of things you throw on one side, and——"

"I give all my old dresses to my maid," says Hetty, with dignity.

"And a pretty penny she must make out of them," says the Chancellor, holding up her hands; "pr'aps, now, I might do a stroke of business with *her*, ma'am? I'll go up to the house, and see."

"No, no," cries Hetty, her airs utterly routed; for would it not be death to bring the Chancellor and that smartest of fine ladies, Rosalie, *en rapport?* "I—I left her in town."

"I should have hardly thought you ekal to folding up that gown yourself," says the Chancellor, suspiciously; "though to be sure, saving your presence, there was a time when you'd have been 'appy enough to get such a one to fold up."

"You can go," says Hetty, with great distinctness.

"Good-day to you, mem; good-day, sir. I'm sorry to see you looking so ill, for all the world as my brother did last year when he was took in a waste, and died in three months. And if you could persuade Mrs. Sieviking, sir, to buy a silk once in a way, instead of for everlasting wearing them white washing gowns, it would be better for trade, and more becoming to her position. Good-day."

"Do you think she is likely to run up against Rosalie?" says Hetty, quite pale with alarm, as the Chancellor disappears in the direction of the house. "Perhaps I'd better go and make sure." And off she goes at a quicker pace than she has probably used since she left Sieviking.

She has not been gone many minutes when I see Ullathorne approaching with Pink May

from the house. Even at this distance there seems to be something unusual in his mien, and I go to meet him with a distinct presentiment of evil.

Less of friends than foemen is the look exchanged between us, and our hands, meeting, fall asunder almost before they have touched.

"We expected to find Hetty here," says Pink May, who is as fine as a finch in May.

"Where is your wife?" says Ullathorne to me, abruptly.

Our eyes meet.

"Here she is," says Pink May. Turning, we see Hetty and Green Sleeves crossing the lawn together.

For a moment Ullathorne shades his eyes with his hand, holding his breath; then he goes forward to meet them.

I see him stoop to kiss his wife, I see him

look at Green Sleeves; then they all come back to the tree, and sit down.

"You may put your arm round my waist, if you like," says Hetty to her husband; "of course it does not do to make oneself remarkable in town, but there is no disgrace in doing such a thing in the country. Besides, it's comfortable. Upon my word, I think we are beginning to change places with you, Dick, and that you and Charolais are becoming the fashionable couple, while *we* are turning into a Darby and Joan!"

CHAPTER VI.

"If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,
To tell my story."

THE church bells have done ringing, and the house is hushed and silent as the grave. Service has begun, and at last I am alone, to draw breath, to look my position in the face, and to confront the new difficulty that Ullathorne's presence has brought with it.

Hark! what was that? Hasty footsteps crunch the gravel; a man comes in sight—it is Ullathorne himself.

"I thought you had gone to church," I say, as he comes into the room.

"I turned back at the church door. Sievi-king, I would rather say what I have to say anywhere but here, but speak I must, and the sooner the better."

"Say on."

"Two nights ago I had occasion to cross a bridge in an unfrequented portion of the park. The moon gave enough light to show me a man and woman in the centre of the bridge in such deep converse that they did not even observe me pass. You were that man—the woman, who was she?"

"That is my affair."

"Yesterday, thinking you would come down by a late train, I went to your rooms to propose that we should travel together. found a woman there—the same that I had seen with you the night before."

"What!" I cry, starting up, "she dared to go *there?* She must have watched me home—she may follow me even here."

"Then it is true," cries Ullathorne. "Good God! and I have been refusing, even in the teeth of facts, to believe it possible!"

"*What* is true?" I say, turning and facing him.

"You can ask?" he says, with a fierce gesture of loathing. "*You*, who in the minds of all who know you best, are set so far above mere vulgar sin and its degradations?"

"Sin?" I repeat, mechanically; "you call it sin? You talked to her, I suppose, and she told you all."

"She told me nothing in words," he says, with disgust. "Eyes, voice, manner spoke their own tale plainly enough; yet in the face of all I *would* not accept your guilt. I said to myself that accident might have brought you

together at that late hour of night, that she might have forced her way unbidden into your rooms—though her air was entirely that of one in her right—but you deny nothing."

"I deny your right to challenge my actions," I say, haughtily. "Neither to you nor any other man am I responsible for them."

"When you challenged mine," he says, quietly, "when you branded me as dishonourable, and cried shame on the day when you and I had been as brothers, I bore your unjust taunts through a sense of honour to *her* who was as ignorant of my love as I was incapable of making her aware of it, and my self-contempt was so bitter that I could patiently endure yours. Now our positions are reversed, and as once you strove to save *me*, so now no false pride shall stand in the way of my saving *you*."

"You cannot save me, Ullathorne; it is too late."

"It is never too late, or too soon, to shake off the shackles of such a sin as this—the longer the stain continues the deeper it sinks. Wake friend, *wake*, from the deadly stupor thrown over you, and be able to see once more your wife's sweet face, your boy's smile, your friend's heart—pick yourself up all bruised and muddied from the recent fall, but still *yourself*, and thank God that you have not been permitted to pass into that lethargy of the soul that ends in death."

"Death! He never knocks at the doors where he is welcome."

"I do not speak of the common lot—that is imposed on us—but of that other which is vested in our own hands. Friend, do you ever think of what you hoped to be, and what you now *are?*"

"Often."

"Dick, there are men who profess to love their wives and yet behave as you are doing, contemptible curs, who can combine vice with virtue so cleverly that neither the world nor the outraged woman ever suspects the truth—but you are not one of those men. For you the fall is sheer from virtue to vice, and that you are not able to find happiness abroad and at home simultaneously, is proved by the misery of your attitude towards your wife, and hers towards you."

"Leave us as we are; do not meddle between us," I cry, fiercely.

"There is that between you in which I have no hand," he says, sadly; "it would break my heart to see on the face of the woman I had married such as I see on that of your wife's. Yours is not the nature to play out a common course of deceit to the end—your

conscience does not permit you to rest happy in your infatuation. If you desire content you must give up one or the other—your present vacillating, contemptible policy only makes each one miserable, and must end in a catastrophe. Choose between them, man, the vile beautiful stranger or the pure lovely little creature, who by her wife and motherhood is bound to you by a thousand ties of suffering and of love—but never seek in the same hand to hold both."

"How dare you name them in the same breath?" I cry, through my clenched teeth.

"I dare to utter—what you dare to *live*. Man, you do not love her; I see it in your eyes—can you not overcome this mad infatuation and *leave* her?"

"I cannot."

"You will not even promise me to try?"

"It would be no good."

"*What* is her attraction?" he bursts out in a voice of disgust; "is it her magnificent beauty that has made a fool of you? Learn, then, that it is at every man's disposal—that she is no more faithful to you in heart than in eye and word—and it is for such a return as *this* that you are sacrificing such home happiness as never man knew!"

"A word with you," I say, gripping his shoulder, "what are these passages between you and—*her?*"

"None," he says, shaking himself free, "I meddle not with another man's quarry. Others may not be so punctilious—therefore if you value her, have a care. Pah! to give up all for a woman who has not even the merit to pretend to be faithful to you!"

"Have a care," I cry, warningly. But his scorn is so much nobler than my anger that my eyes fall before him, and for the first time

in my life I know the bitter degradation of being despised where hitherto I have been honoured.

"What do you propose to yourself?" he goes on, pacing the room with rapid steps—"that when this mad infatuation shall have worn itself out you will return to Charolais, and repent conveniently in her innocent arms? Let me tell you that she is not one of those easy wives—that when *you* are ready to proffer your languid affection, you will find you have irretrievably lost her love."

"No, no," I cry, the words wrung from me; "not that—don't say that——"

"She loves you yet," says Ullathorne; "I saw her to-day look towards you with eyes full of love, then clasp her little hands above her heart, and half move towards you, then draw back—and then sigh so pitifully . . . Sieviking, at that moment I *hated* you."

"And yet she did not come to my side. Ullathorne—she makes not one sign of love——"

"She is proud—no woman worthy of the name would proffer love where it is not welcome, and so make herself disgustful to him. Cleanse your heart and life of this foul sin, and she will come to you quickly enough—instinct keeps her from you now."

"She has the child," I say, curtly; "after a time she will grow to love him best, and be happy."

"Yes, she loves him," he says slowly. "I looked through the window this morning, and saw a picture. It was only a young mother who was holding out her arms to a little child, who, for the first time, stood alone. He feared to move a step forward, yet longed to reach the embrace just beyond its reach. Thus, she luring him on, love at length gave him

courage, and he tottered a few hasty steps forward to be caught to the mother's breast. . . . O! Dick, what a hug was there! It was as though she were devoured by hunger, and he the only thing at hand wherewith to stay it, and I thought those two pretty faces that kissed and clung to one another had something of sadness in them that the presence of one person would have removed."

At this moment, from the garden without, we hear the child's tender little voice, like a young bird dwelling upon the one note that it knows, calling "Papa! papa!"

I press my hands against my ears.

"Would to God," I cry, "that he had never been born!"

"Rather thank God that two such guiltless creatures call you father and husband," he cries warmly. "O! that the centre, the mainspring of such a home and hearts as these

should place himself at the mercy of a wanton's caprice! Man, man! you are throwing all away, *for what?* You find no sweetness in this miserable tie—your face tells that. You are like the children who fling away their toys to run after and seek to seize the jewels that they are told lie sparkling where the rainbow touched the earth, and when you awake from your madness what will remain to you?"

"Work."

"If you can work with such a memory as yours will be, you are to be envied."

"I will make her happy," I say, doggedly. "She shall be amused, distracted. I will make it my business to pass the time quickly to her."

"You will give her a stone for bread," he says, bitterly, "and she will—die. But before that she will discover the truth--she is on the

high road to discovering it now—and leave you."

"Never!" I cry, fiercely; "she remains—here. Through me she shall never know the truth. There is only one other who can tell it her—you."

"And what if I tell her?"

"I will kill you."

"*Once* I had not been ashamed to die by your hand; *now* to meet death by it would be dishonour."

A moment, and two men are locked together in desperate struggle; the next, a woman's voice on the threshold causes them to fall asunder, each wild passion dashed weak as water unto earth, as, with outstretched hands, there hurries forward my Lady Green Sleeves.

CHAPTER VII.

"Come, come, in wooing sorrow let's be brief,
Since, wedding it, there is such length in grief.
One kiss shall stop our mouths, and dumbly part,
Thus give I mine, and thus I take thy heart."

"WHAT!" she cries, "you would fight on my account? O!" she turns to Ullathorne, "do not seek to kill him because he cannot love me! If I can forgive him, cannot you?"

"Charolais," stammers Ullathorne, "we have been quarrelling over a foolish trifle; but what has that to do with you?"

She does not heed him; she comes groping as one blind until she has found me. As she

lays her hand upon my arm the door closes upon Ullathorne; we are alone.

"Dick," she says, looking up in my face, "is it true?"

I cannot lie to her; she reads the truth in my eyes, and without a word drops at my feet. Thank God I can take her in my arms, and she will not know it; I can kiss her lips and call her by every foolish, desperate word oflove that my heart suggests, and she will not hear me; thank God that once more she is as much my own as in the days when no other woman had come between us and our great love for one another.

As she lies in my arms, I ask myself must not that man be a wretch upon whose heart this pale loveliness, sweet as the bruised, beaten-down petals of a white violet, would not take more hold than that of a certain magnificent beauty of which I wot?

I kiss her hair, her little hands, her lips, I rock her in my arms as though she were a child. She is mine, *mine* for the last time maybe on earth, and with jealous eyes I watch against each sigh of returning consciousness, and could find it in my heart to wish that she might never waken to hatred of me, and the truth. As yet this pretty face has worn but love and smiles for me, from those dark eyes have looked but honour and such pride in me as should have created the world they seemed to behold. How shall I bear her contempt, or see myself shrivel in her regard to a pigmy, defaced by a despicable vulgar sin, that her woman's nature will not even permit her to comprehend?

And yet, when at length she struggles back to consciousness, instinct, not memory, guiding her, she clings to me like a frightened child; her bewildered eyes seek safety in mine; then

for a moment her head falls forward on my breast. She sighs.

"I had a dream," she says, vaguely, "a bad dream, Dick. How came I to fall asleep in the daytime?"

She draws one arm from my neck, sits up, and looks round bewildered, till her eyes fall on the prayer book that she has all through held tightly clutched in her hand.

Memory grows in her dark eyes. "Not yet! not yet!" I cry, holding her to me, but she slips out of my arms, and stands alone.

"It was not a dream," she says, shuddering, and pointing to the red cross on the little book. "While I listened to you, *this* seemed to burn itself into my very heart. . . . I remember now."

There is a sound of voices without; the rest have returned, but Ullathorne gets them all away, the boys loudly grumbling that they

may not go in and see if Charolais has recovered from the faintness that made her come out of church.

"Poor fellows," she says, mechanically; "they will be sorry—they will miss me."

Her eyes leave the open window and return to me. I have been watching her, wondering if her pride be greater than her love—whether she will spurn me, in her keen sense of outraged womanhood, or, true to that nobler womanliness so infinitely more potent to reach a man's heart, be conscious only of *her* loss and my fall . . . Not the wrong, but the pity of it, is surely the cry of every true woman who loves, and who finds herself betrayed.

"I cannot rail at you," she says, dully; "that would not give me back your heart. I said that we were too happy . . . O! Dick, Dick, is it *you?* The truest, best, noblest lover . . . O!" she cries, desperately, "it *cannot*

be true—it must be all a mistake! Say it is a mistake," she cries, coming to my side, her anguished eyes seeking mine piteously, with only love, pure love looking at me out of them. But I answer her not a word.

Before my silence she shrinks back as from a blow, and catches at the table for support.

"I have been proud," she says, below her breath. "O! God forgive me for that. I felt that something had come between us, and I *could* not seek you; but, perhaps, if I had been gentler, *kinder*, I might have won you back, or, at least, things would never have come to this."

She might have won me back! O! Green Sleeves . . .

"And so that is why you have avoided me these past weeks," she says, slowly; "because another woman had taken my place. And you did well in that. My humiliation would be

greater than I could bear if you could have come from her to me, and pretended to love me still."

The colour leaps into her cheek, as one stung by a bitter shame, she covers up her face, and shivers.

I stretch out my arms towards her with a wild, desperate yearning of which she knows nothing. When again she lifts her head, I am standing apart by the window.

"It has been my own fault," she says, very low. "She who has not the power to keep a man's love has only herself to blame if another woman wins it from her. I was never beautiful, like this person whom you love, or noble, like Florizel. I could only—*love* you."

A shadow crosses the sunlight; it is Suzel with the child in her arms. He catches sight of his mother in passing, holds out two eager hands, and calls upon her by name.

Her face changes, the slow terrible tears gather in her brown eyes . . . I know how that little voice has knocked at her heart, how at once the pride, the misery of motherhood work within her, how as wife and mother equally, my desertion strikes her with a cruel sense of outrage. . .

"You never loved him as I did," she says, with quivering lips; "or you could not—you could not have done it."

"I never loved anything or anybody on earth but you," I cry, fiercely; "and you know it, Green Sleeves, you know it."

"You love me?" she says, trembling; "and how can that be? I heard you say that you could not, and would not give her up. If you loved me, would you desire to continue that which makes us both wretched?"

"Green Sleeves," I cry, snatching her two hands, "disbelieve in circumstances—my own

words, my *acts* even—believe only in *me*, and that I love you to the very last beat of my heart, as I never have loved, never could love any other woman living."

She looks up; through our eyes, heart speaks to heart, and in a moment we are clinging to each other—our lips have rushed together, and time loses itself in a kiss that has no past, no future, only a present in which the hoarded sweetness and riches of a lifetime are gathered up.

"O! my little one—my little one," I cry, as, that supreme moment past, she *remembers* and seeks to escape, "stay with me—do not go away from me—believe nothing but that I *love* you."

"Dick," she says, almost in a whisper, "all my pride is dead . . . if I can forgive you, I will . . . tell me the whole story, husband . . . and give me a little time in which to get over it."

"I can tell you nothing," I say, doggedly, "but that I love you."

"What!" she cries, pale as death; "you have no explanation to give me—you will not tell me that you are less guilty than Ullathorne . . . and I . . . supposed?"

"I can explain nothing."

She looks at me with wild, incredulous eyes, eyes in which love will surely never grow for me again . . .

"Oh! you ask too much," she cries, bitterly; "and your circumstances are too strong for me. I will go away, as I resolved to do when I overheard you . . . I and my little baby, and leave you free to be happy with *her*."

"No," I say; "you shall not go away; you and the child remain—here."

"Never!" she cries with spirit, "if you had told me the whole truth, and had sworn to me never to speak to that woman again—

could you have done that?" she adds, abruptly.

"No."

"And yet you would keep me here!" she cries. "O! what degradation . . . I will go this very day, and I will tear this love for you from my heart, or *die* . . ."

She starts up, her spirit fairly roused at last, passionate shame in every line of her face; for the moment her love trampled down, and set at nought by her pride.

"Wherever you go I will follow you," I say, doggedly, "and bring you back; so do not think to escape me, Green Sleeves!"

"You would become my jailer?" she cries, with contempt. "You would make me sicken at the sight of you, till my hatred for you was greater than my love had ever been?"

"I would rather have your hatred than another woman's love. I would rather that

you died in my arms than were happy out of them—and that is my love for you, Green Sleeves."

"Love!" she says, below her breath; "O! no, you never *loved* me! What is she? *who* is she?—this woman that has changed your very nature, and in a day is able to overthrow the traditions, the influences, of years? You have never been one to love lightly, or let go easily. If already she is stronger than I, then I will not stoop to contest you with her—only let me and my child go away together . . ."

I turn aside to think hard and deep.

She is right; there is no chance of happiness, or, on her side, of anything but disgust, if we continue to live together.

Some one would ever shoulder her away from my embrace—'twixt her and me would pass, hateful as the clay-cold corpse laid between the bridegroom and his bride, a

woman's shape, and every innocent joy would be poisoned by that guilty consciousness of which I had not power to free myself.

"Charolais," I say, abruptly, "it shall be as you desire. I will not inflict my presence on you, but I exact one condition—that you still continue to live here with the child."

"I cannot keep you out of your home," she says, in the dull, effortful voice of one in whom hope is utterly dead, "and it would be torture to me to be here, to be reminded at every turn of what my life once was—of what you once were . . . O! it is a heavy price that you pay for your new love—wife, child, Sieviking!"

Ay, the price is heavy, but it is one that will be exacted to the uttermost farthing, and I know it, as I stand looking out at the lands so long coveted, so lately mine, that after to-day my eyes may never behold again.

"Green Sleeves," I say, turning, "though we talked for ever, we could not alter things—only death can do that, or restore us to one another. Do not let us quarrel over so slight a thing as whether you shall live here, or elsewhere. Choose whether you will remain unmolested by me—for I swear never to set foot in Sieviking again unless summoned by you—or to be followed by me wherever you go; and remember (I drew a hard breath before inflicting on her the cruellest stab of all) I have full power to take the child from you if you refuse to yield to my authority."

"You would take him from me?" she cries, her dark eyes wild with fear. "O! God forgive you for that speech!"

At this moment we hear his voice without. Instinctively, and as one who in her anguish knows relief to be at hand, she stretches out her arms, and turns towards the door.

"O! my baby—my little baby," she moans as she goes, in a voice that it might break any man's heart to hear.

I put her back, I go out, and, taking the child from the nurse's arms, send her away, and bring him to his mother.

And then I say to myself that there is no hurt to a woman's heart that her child's kiss cannot heal . . . and I go away, leaving them there together, knowing that I have prevailed, and that at least she will be safely sheltered among those who love her well.

CHAPTER VIII.

"It's I will kiss your bonny cheek,
And I will kiss your chin;
And I will kiss your clay-cauld lip,
But I'll ne'er kiss woman again."

IN the hall I meet Hetty.

"Can you tell me whether we are to have any luncheon to-day?" she says, resignedly; "also, whether every person in the house but myself has temporarily gone out of his senses?"

"Come with me," I say, taking her hand; and, wondering much, she accompanies me to the school-room, and sits down opposite me.

"Hetty, Charolais and I are going to part."

She stares at me for a moment in utter amazement, then slowly shakes her head.

"I'm not surprised—much," she says, "for of course I couldn't help seeing how wretched you were together. But why more wretched to-day than any other? I shouldn't have thought you ever got near enough to one another—to *quarrel*."

"We have not quarrelled . . . but, for the future, I shall live entirely in town, and she will remain here."

"H'm! A case of Edmonton and Ware, and the staring will follow as a matter of course. What a million pities that you did not marry Florizel!"

"Hetty, you will be kind to her: you will try and make her life a little happier, if you can?"

She looks at me, then puts an arm around my neck, and kisses me.

"Poor boy," she says; "somehow, things never seem to go straight for you. I declare you are beginning to look quite old and gray. But you and Charolais will make it up again, never fear."

"No; it is nothing that can ever be made up."

"Ah! so people always say at the time. I met Ullathorne looking as though he were going to be hanged—does *he* know?"

"Yes."

"Well, take my advice; tell nobody else. Sit down to luncheon as though nothing had happened, and afterwards go to Charolais. Now that you two *are* married, why not make the best of a bad job? Besides, your means will never permit of your keeping up two establishments, and a scandal in the family would be

extremely disagreeable; so do be reasonable, Dick!"

"Did you ever know me take up or relinquish a thing lightly?" I say, sternly. "Charolais and I to-day part *for ever*. Try for a moment to put yourself in her place, and feel for her."

"No," says Hetty, "I cannot. I should never quarrel with my husband. In society no one does such a thing."

"But the fault is mine," I cry; "*she* has done nothing."

"I should never have married a person who was likely to treat me badly," says Hetty, calmly, "and I don't believe it's your fault. But, of course, I will be kind to Charolais, poor girl! It is lucky she is so wrapped up in the child, but I think she was really fond of you *once*."

I turn away with a groan—O! poor, ignorant Hetty.

"And now," I say, "I want you to go to lunch with Pink May, and the boys, and Ullathorne, and will you ask him to come to me here afterwards?"

"You come, too," she says, coaxingly, "and I will go afterwards and talk to Charolais and see what I can do."

"No, no," I say, shuddering, as I think of that young figure sitting in its terrible despair with the child pressed against her bosom; "I forbid your going near her, Hetty, and no one is to disturb her."

"O! very well," she says, departing with a displeased air; and then I am left alone in the old familiar room with my thoughts.

There is not a nook or corner in it that is not endeared to me by memory, or by those later and sweeter joys that I shall never taste again. Here I have sat with Green Sleeves—yonder she and I have worked together, with

many a pause between for play—by the old spinet stands our little boy's high chair with a broken toy on its seat—on every side is some token of the happy home life that was mine.

Will my darling venture into this beloved haunt in which the very walls will speak to her of me and cry aloud my name? If she comes it will be trembling, and with many a pause and halt between, and then, please God, she will weep if her heart be not broken beyond the power of tears. On the ground I spy a ribbon—*hers*. As I press it to my lips Ullathorne comes in, and before I can thrust it out of sight, has seen gesture and ribbon, both.

"Dick," he says, "we were angry—we acted like madmen; for God's sake let us see if we can do anything to put this miserable business straight instead of quarrelling. There is something in all this that I *can't* understand, and

I'm convinced you *could* explain the whole thing if you chose."

"Where *she* could not succeed," I say; "judge if you are likely to do so? No, Ullathorne, she and I part for ever; I have no more explanation to give her than you."

"But you love her still," he cries. "I saw it in your eyes when she came in—your face now tells the mortal agony it is to you to lose her."

"Can anything you can ever say to me equal the power of one of her pleading words?" I cry fiercely. "There is not another syllable to be said on the subject. We have parted for ever."

"O! it is monstrous!" he cries. "I give you warning, Sieviking, that I will not rest till I have got to the bottom of this secret—that I will spare no pains to break you of your mad infatuation; you shall have proof

and to spare of the worthlessness of the creature for whom you are sacrificing your wife."

"Dare to meddle in my affairs," I say, through my set teeth, "and you shall bitterly rue the day in which you refused to accept my warning. If you have any affection for *her*, leave well alone, and do not seek to know a fraction more than you know already."

"Am I to see her die without making the slightest effort to save her?"

"Ay," I say, hoarsely, "even that rather than the other. Now to business. Will you accept the charge of her in so far as your power lies? Will you tell me from time to time how she fares? Above all, will you guard against any knowledge reaching her that is calculated to make her more miserable than she is already?"

"You set me a strange task," he says, bitterly. "Such things as these you might have asked a friend to do—and we are not friends after to-day. The man that I have loved and honoured is dead. Before Heaven I would not change places with you as you stand to-day."

"Yes, yes, I say," his words holding no meaning for me, for overhead I think I hear *her* footstep, and my mind is possessed by the question of how I can contrive to get another sight of her before I go.

"You have promised," I say, as I rise, and mechanically look round the room, with a vague, unreal feeling that I am only dreaming over again the farewell I said to it so many years ago. "I will write to you about money arrangements, and for God's sake keep my sisters from tormenting her, if you can! I shall tell them nothing—whether they are to

know the truth must rest with Charolais herself."

"*What* is the truth?"

I go out, not answering him, and upstairs, and so to my darling's room; but she is not there—to the nursery, which is empty of any but the child, the nurse being in the room beyond.

He comes tottering towards me on his little unsteady feet, and as I take him in my arms, and he lifts his tender little mouth to kiss me, the iron band about my heart gives way, and the first tears that have left my eyes since childhood fall on his wondering, beautiful face.

The nurse approaches—I put him down and leave the nursery—he may be a grown man before ever my eyes light on him again.

Ten minutes later I enter the dining-room, and each voice is hushed as I go up to Pink May, and lay my hand on her arm.

"Aunt," I say, quietly; "I am going away from Sieviking to-day for a long while—perhaps for ever. I leave Charolais and the child in your hands, and pray of you to guard them as jealously as I myself could have done."

Before she has recovered her breath sufficiently to speak I turn to the others.

"Boys—you will make your home here so far as you are able; and if you should ever wish to see me, you know where I am to be found in town. Take care of your little Charolais, . . . your playmate." My speech chokes me; I struggle out the one word "Good-bye," and leave them.

Then they all start up; even Hetty, with sobs, caresses, and would follow me, but I put them all back. I have one more farewell to make, and that must be alone.

Where I found her first with the green sleeves on her arms (those sleeves that with a

certain pair of tiny shoes are hoarded away as my greatest treasures), there I find her now, a woman, not a child, with a woman's breaking heart looking out of her dark eyes.

Short and bitter must be this farewell, with never a pause for thought, or I shall be betrayed into some madness of dishonour worse than any that has gone before; I shall take between my lips some promise that I am powerless to keep, and retain her love at the fearful cost of her degradation as well as my own.

She sees me approach, but only looks up in a dull fashion, as one who has no longer aught to hope or to fear from me, and when I kneel by her side, she neither moves nor speaks.

"Green Sleeves," I say, and my voice is as dull and passionless as her white face, "I have come to wish you good-bye."

Her lips shape themselves to the word "Good-bye," but utter no sound.

"And you will kiss me once, Green Sleeves, for the last time."

Is it better for me that I asked this last boon—that the memory of that clinging kiss in which our souls were merged in one another, should be shouldered aside by one so cold and apathetic that it falls away from my lips almost before it has reached them?

Better a passionate refusal than this cold, cold acquiescence—I lift her hand; that, too, is chill as ice. As I linger she speaks, and her voice is coldëst of all.

"Good-bye."

And then I go my way, not looking back, for I know that beneath the supreme test of a woman's love the knowledge that another woman is preferred to herself, Green Sleeves' love for me waxes faint, and is like to die.

BOOK V.

CHAPTER I.

"'Tis not the frost that freezes fell,
Nor blawing snaws inclemencie;
'Tis nae sic cauld as makes me cry,
But my love's heart grown cauld to me."

IT is Christmas Eve, and I am alone—alone with the ghosts that come thronging about my knees, or look at me with sad, estranged eyes out of the heart of the fire before which I sit.

Sweetheart, friends, brothers, sisters, chill with contempt or hot with condemnation,

their faces one by one rise before me, and only when they have all faded, comes that of a child whose blue eyes smile up at me with the only look of welcome worn for me now by any human creature on earth, whose lips alone, scarce knowing what they utter, call upon my name in tenderness and love.

A year ago, and he was less to me than the least of the curls on my Lady Green Sleeves' head; now I seem to see my error most clearly, not in the evil consequences that have fallen upon her, but in those terrible ones in the future that must befall *him*. I have lost her love for ever, but I would win and keep his, and as I sit in my lonely room of evenings I recall the many times when I put his caresses by, and long passionately for one touch of those tender, trustful lips. The boys talk laboriously to me of him when they come once in a way to see me, good, honest fellows whose

contempt for me is so hearty as to awaken their protective instinct and make them careful to avoid hurting my feelings.

"The youngster grows your very image," they say, "and he has not forgotten you a bit."

Now surely this is odd, for a child of two has little memory. Some one must speak of me to him, and who but his mother, for all that she is never heard to speak my name? Cold and silent as one about which a shroud is woven, her face looks at me out of the coals, and I ask myself if indeed she could once have fretted sorely for me, and loved me well, and even for one brief moment have put pride away for my sake?

Her face fades, and Florizel's takes its place, eloquent with love, sublime in its noble faith, as with passionate words she pleads, as Ullathorne could not do, Green Sleeves' cause

against the stranger woman; then hers, too, changes, and I see the love and the belief swept away in a burning torrent of scorn, and in her eyes a great blaze of contempt that should scorch to ashes the sin that disfigures my soul. And my friend—my ain friend—what of him? I cover my face with my hands. All these I have lost, and I have gained—what?

I lift my eyes to see the answer before me. A tall figure, cloaked and hooded, has entered the room. With a sudden movement the wrappings are flung back, and a woman is kneeling by my side.

"Do not send me away!" she cries, clinging to me. "Richard, Richard! you are lonely here to-night, and I am lonely too, and I *could* not stay away from you!"

I unclasp her arms without a word, but as I rise, she snatches at my hands and hides her

face upon them. I have no power to free myself from her as she half kneels, half crouches at my feet.

"Strike me!" she cries, "spurn me from you with your foot—treat me as you would treat your dog, only let me breathe the air you breathe! let me see your face sometimes, touch your hand, and hear your voice! Deprive me of light, air, food, but do not expect me to *live* without ever a sight of you!"

"Hagar," I say, wearily, "what new madness is this? Did you not promise me that you would not come here again, especially after what happened last time? You have your own home—a very different one to this."

"Yes," she says, bitterly, "in which you never set foot. I only went there on conditions that you have broken, and so I throw my promise also to the winds, and am here to-night."

"I have been busy."

"Busy!" She throws her arms above her head with a magnificent gesture of disdain. "Would every combined obstacle on earth keep me from *you* did I know myself welcome?"

To what shall I compare her as she stands before me?—flame? night? a whirlwind? There was a time when I counted Green Sleeves dark—now, in my memory, she shines white as a sea-mew beside the dark splendour of a loveliness that seems to fill my miserable room with warmth and colour. I turn aside with a shudder.

"If you look at me like that," she cries, swiftly, "I will kill you. Hatred I can bear, neglect has become to me as bitter, as natural as life, but your contempt I cannot, and will not endure. And to think—O! my God—to think that once you loved

me!—loved me as no man before or since ever did."

"*Since?*" I cry, turning on her.

"Why not?" she says, a sudden flame lighting up her black eyes. "You leave me alone—you show by every word, look, and action that the tie between us is a hateful one—and if I turned to other men for the love you deny me, could you wonder—could you blame me?"

"Do what you will. Your actions can neither honour nor dishonour me now."

"You *loved* me once!" she cries fiercely; "O! those days — that was love, that was idolatry, if you will! I tasted life then—I drank it to the very dregs. . . . any love that I had known before, waxed cold as death, feeble as an infant's wail beside that one superb torrent that swept me before it as a leaf—and left me to wither as one!"

"That was not love," I say, with a gesture of loathing. "I never loved you — never. But had you behaved decently I would have done my duty by you to the end."

"I did not love you then," she says, sullenly. "I am not one to love lightly. Until the past few weeks I never dreamed what you had become to me, or I would have escaped before it became too late. And, however you may scorn me, I tell you this: that when a woman, no matter how bad she is, really loves, she is as good as the best woman, or better, for the latter has never been tempted, and much that shines as pure gold would quickly melt if passed through the furnace of temptation."

"That may be; but such love I do not covet."

"I have not forced it on you; I do not ask you to love *me*. I ask only the right to love

you, to be with you sometimes, to serve you—not to be thrust away from your side like any stranger."

"It is impossible," I say, sternly. "You know the terms of our agreement, and I will not depart from them. You can either leave me altogether, or let things go on as they have hitherto done."

"And what if I stand on my rights?" she says, facing me defiantly.

"You have none; your own conduct destroyed them long ago."

"I have enough to separate you from the woman you love," she cries, "and that such a woman exists I am convinced. It is nothing to me that since the night we met you have never been out of town above half-a-dozen days in all; that you write no letters, receive none, and bury yourself night and day in your books. I know that she exists, and.

that the love you once gave to me has now become hers."

"No," I cry, unguardedly, "it is a very different love. And what would you do if you discovered her?"

"Tell her the truth."

"And what if she knew it already?"

"There *is* such a woman," she cries, suddenly, "and I will find her."

"How?"

"By will and patience. Already I have learned something—that you are not of the class to which you have represented yourself as belonging."

"I told you I was of the middle class—as I am."

"That you worked for your bread."

"As I do."

"I have made inquiries," she goes on, "and once I thought I had traced you to be one of

an old county family who live at a place called Sieviking Court, but the head of that family is a surgeon—so I knew I was mistaken."

"Let well alone," I say, curtly; "you are better off as you are."

"There is one man who could tell me the truth about you," she says, slowly; "but he is abroad now. When he returns I will——"

She pauses abruptly, as a loud knocking is heard below.

"Hide yourself, quick! You will be found here," I cry, snatching up her cloak and hood as I hear footsteps ascending, and a man's voice calling my name. But to my surprise she stands perfectly still, pale as a corpse, her eyes opened wide in a kind of stupor, and fixed upon the door.

"Who is that?" she says, lifting her finger and pointing towards it.

"Gilfillian," I answer, forgetting in my ex-

citement that I never tell her the names of my friends, and hurrying her towards a second door leading to an inner room. "There, quick, you can reach the stairs through this"—but she has scarcely passed through it when Gilly bursts in, half mad with drink, yet with eyes keen enough to see the skirts disappearing through the opposite door.

CHAPTER II.

Bassanio. Do all men kill the things they do not love?
Shylock. Hates any man the thing he would not kill?

"A! ha!" says Gilly, as he reels towards me; "a petticoat, Dick? O! fie! What would——"

I dash my hand over his mouth before he can complete his speech, and he falls back as though beneath a blow.

Throwing open the door through which Hagar passed, I fling the light of the lamp around, but she is not there. I lock the outer one communicating with the stairs, and return to the sitting-room.

"Why, man alive," he says, as I sit down opposite him, "have you taken leave of your senses? And—no offence, Dick—but I'm sorry."

"What about?"

He nods towards the door through which Hagar passed.

"I saw your wife once, and she seemed to be a woman who might keep any man straight. I looked at her, and remembered I once had a mother and a sister. . . . Women now-a-days are apt to make a man forgetful of that fact."

He has been drinking deeply, but as yet has lost control over neither brain nor voice. As his eyes meet mine I see that he has reached the drunkard's last excess—opium.

"Where have you been hiding yourself, lad," he says, "all these months? They couldn't tell me at St. Saviour's. The house-surgeon thought you'd cut the profession, and

gone to live in the country, and at your lodgings they could only tell me that you'd left, leaving no address."

His wild eyes wander round the room with a puzzled expression.

"Yesterday I met one of your young brothers, and asked him for your address—and here I am. But I thought you'd come into some money, Dick, and bought some old place with it? John James told me something of the sort—or I dreamed it."

"I live here always," I say, stirring the fire, "and I am as poor as you, Gilly—and poorer."

"Ah!" he says, with a gleam of light on his face, "then that was your wife I saw just now. I'm glad of that Dick—very. But I wish I could see you in a better place. You ought to begin to make a little money, now."

"It is a very little, truly."

"You've not gone in for a hospital appointment?"

"No."

"You are right. Hospital appointments, without private means to back them, usually land their holders in the workhouse. Every soul connected with the hospital gets paid except the medical men, without whom the whole thing must collapse. THEY are expected to give the best years of their lives, the fruits of a costly and arduous education—for nothing. But this they are told leads to practice; so they go patiently on for ten, fifteen, twenty years, living meanwhile entirely at their own expense, and if they can hold out so long, perhaps begin to succeed when they should be about retiring on the fortunes they would have amassed in almost any other walk of life (the professions excepted). Or the man dies, just as he has turned the corner, leaving no provi-

sion for wife or children, or health and purse fail him before the tide of fortune has turned, and then there is another of those sad events that are a result of the radically-wrong system upon which hospitals are managed."

The fire of an honest indignation for a moment pierces the dull glare of his eyes; then he stretches out his hand as though to reach something—the most significant of all traits of the habitual drunkard.

"No; I did not mean to go in for that, Gilly. I was not ambitious then, and a little country practice, with ample time in which to read, think, and possibly invent, would have satisfied me. But that is over now—for the present I have dropped the profession, and whether I ever resume it again is uncertain."

"Why, man, what do you do?"

"A friend's influence procured me a berth in the City. I am thus able to earn bread

and cheese for such as are dependent on me."

"And what does John James say?"

"He does not know. He had an accident five months ago, from which he has not recovered yet. I went to see him last week."

"He is a good fellow, Dick—he had a blow once, as I did; but my blow was different, and I took it differently."

"You lost some one you were fond of, Gilly?" I say, something in his face moving me with a sudden compassion for the poor wretch.

"No," he says, his dull eyes looking away over my head, "I never lost her—she went willingly. Fifteen years ago this very night my wife kissed, and bade me good night, for I had been ill, Dick, ill unto death, and when I awoke on Christmas morning with her name on my lips, I called for her in vain; she had

fled in the night with the man who had been her lover before I married her."

I listen to him intently—this story to which John James has alluded more than once comes home to me.

"She did not love him, but intrigue was natural to her as the air she breathed, and she disliked him one degree less than me, had already repented of her marriage with me, and, as lightly as a butterfly breaks a spider's gossamer thread, snapped the chain that bound us, and was free."

"How long had she been your wife?"

"Three months. I was twenty years older than she. I married her on her sixteenth birthday in Paris. I had gone over there to make certain researches connected with a work on which I was engaged, and one day, in the *Place de la Concorde*, I saw a young lady grossly insulted by a fellow in a blouse. I

came to her rescue, escorted her home to a poor but decent quarter of the town, saw her mother—a careworn, jaded likeness of her beautiful child—called next day, and in three weeks was married.

"No words could do justice to her beauty, but the moral sense, as I speedily found out, was wholly wanting. Intellect was a sealed book to her—a man was noble, clever, and adorable to her only in so far as he was able to gratify every caprice and desire of her passionate, pleasure-loving nature; she was as a piece of wax to receive every exquisite impression, and anything beautiful either in man or woman, nature or art, would rouse her to enthusiasm.

"Fair of face, light of foot, proud of glance —masterful with the strength of the finely-tempered Damascus blade, not the clumsy, brutal strength of the heavy battle-axe;

often and often I have heard her thus describe her ideal man, and many and many a time as I have looked at you, Dick, I have thought how exactly you fulfilled this woman's idea of perfection, and how, if she had ever met you—bah! where is she now? I am talking of fifteen years ago, lad, fifteen years ago. And that is all the story—but at every Christmas-tide it all comes back to me as fresh to-day as if it were yesterday, and I seem to see her as she came to me where I lay, worn and weak, with scarcely the strength to utter her name, her beauty as fresh, as glorious as a newly-blown crimson rose to which the dew still clung, and kissed me good-night. I fell asleep with words of blessing for her on my lips, with tears of yearning love for her in my eyes, for I had grown to love her, Dick. She was so young, I, so old, it was like loving a child who

might vex you, but with whom you could not be long angry, since it was so utterly dependent on your protection. I loved her with the one true, pure affection of my life; up to that time I had not been a bad man, as men go, but she might have made me a good one."

His head falls forward on his breast; for a moment his wild eyes soften.

"Well, it's a poor creature that will throw his soul away after a wanton, but there are men like that, and I'm one of them. I did not follow them; I was too ill, and if I had come across them then I should have killed them both. Even now I get the feeling in my fingers sometimes"—his hands slowly open and shut as if they closed on something, and into his eyes comes a look of murder that is as a brief glimpse of hell—"and if I come across her then, with the drink on me, I should *kill* her, lad, throttle the breath out of her

body, as she has throttled the life out of my soul."

What was that? A stifled cry seems to sound at my very side; I start up, but on the point of searching for its cause, Gilly's face and attitude arrest my attention.

He is leaning forward, his arms stretched out before him on the table, the fingers spasmodically contracted, his eyes wide open and glaring over my head at something he surely *sees*.

I turn, expecting I know not what, but there is nothing save the wall behind me.

"To throttle," he says, in an excited hiss, "that is what the word Sin signifies in the Sanscrit, for the hold that sin takes upon a man is as the grasp of the murderer on the throat of the victim—*Sin—Drink—Satan*, they are all one . . . To slay her body were a less sin than she committed when she slew my soul."

"No," I say sternly; "you slew it yourself. No woman, however bad, has power to do that for a man—she can only make him suffer; his life is still in his own hands."

But he does not hear me; as his clenched hands relax, I seem to see the wandering fires of madness in his eyes; he rises, snatches at his hat, reaches the door, then turns back and wrings my hand hard.

"If ever you wish anything for me," he says, "wish me dead. For if ever that woman crosses my path——" he ceases abruptly, and gazes mistrustfully around. "Somehow her influence is upon me to-night—I seem to feel her near me; think you, Dick, the devil will send her in my way to-night?"

"If he did," I say, as I button up my coat, "you should not harm her."

We go out together, and it is daylight when I return to the dwelling that I now call home.

CHAPTER III.

"And all great fears which now import their dangers,
Would then be nothing; truth would be but tales,
Where now half tales be truths."

TO my surprise a fire is burning in the grate—a man rises to meet me, Ullathorne.

"I came here just after you had gone out last night," he says, "and thinking you would soon be back, waited till now."

His voice is colder than usual, his eyes do not meet mine—I know what he is thinking, and let him think it.

"Hetty had set her heart on my taking you

back for Christmas," he says; "I came to town late last night on purpose to ask you."

"Thanks," I say, curtly, "but it is impossibe, and you know it."

"Yes. But I wanted to speak to you about Charolais. You once bade me guard against any knowledge reaching her that could add to her misery; from information that has reached me, I fancy she runs a chance of being made more wretched than she has ever been yet."

"What threatens her?" I cry, starting up.

"This. Hitherto it has simply been known at Sieviking and the neighbourhood that you and Charolais do not live together, no blame being attached to either, many people believing that it is entirely on account of your profession that you are always in town."

"And what has happened to disturb this belief?" I say, calmly, but with a thrill of fear running through me.

"You once made an enemy—unfortunately, of a man who had injured you. Such a man never forgives, neither does Mr. Titmarsh."

"What! *He* has come back again?"

"Yes, and with some information either guessed or acquired about you that at present he withholds, but at any moment he may proclaim."

I turn aside, and about my heart there creeps some such curious cold as old wives say a man feels when a stranger treads over his grave.

Has all my care after all been in vain? Shall the blow that I have so desperately striven to avert from my Lady Green Sleeves' head fall on it with crushing effect from the hand of my life-long enemy?

"We can only suppose that he knows about this—woman," says Ullathorne after a pause; "that he has watched your house, and seen

her comings and goings, or that he has heard of it in some other way—possibly from herself."

"No, no," I cry, wildly, "it is impossible; she would have told me had such been the case. I will go to her at once, I will warn her against him," and I snatch up my hat in a fever of excitement.

"Stay," cries Ullathorne, "you jump too violently to conclusions. Remember that we have nothing positive to go upon but Mr. Titmarsh's intense curiosity about you, your doings, and certain hints that he has let drop in his conversation with Charolais."

"What! he has seen, he has talked with her?"

"Assuredly. He arrived at Sieviking the day before yesterday, was admitted by some blunder of the servants, and had made a favourable impression on Charolais before she

knew who he was. He asked her how long she had been married, and she told him nearly two years and a half. It was an odd thing, but he took out his note-book then, referred to an entry in it—and smiled."

It flashes across me how only last night Hagar said she could find out all about me from some one now abroad, though I had then taken her to mean a very different man to Mr. Titmarsh. Now I recall many circumstances that point to him as the originator of the whole hideous deception so cunningly planned, so skilfully carried out, and my blood boils within me as I think how for the second time this accursed, smooth-tongued villain has blighted my life, and not mine only, but the two other lives so infinitely dearer to me than my own.

"It struck me," goes on Ullathorne, "that in some way he might have heard of your first marriage abroad, especially, as for the last four

years he has resided almost entirely in Paris, and that was why he asked Charolais when she was married."

"Confound him!" I say, through my teeth; "he would never have dared to set foot in the place if he had not known there was no chance of seeing me there. Where are the boys?"

"In town—he would not have obtained entrance to the house if they had been at home."

"He has my address," I say, grimly; "but I hardly think he will avail himself of it—it will be now my business to obtain *his*. But first, I will go to this woman."

"Not until you have tasted food. Dick, when did you eat last?"

The familiar name spoken by him brings the blood to my cheek—for a moment I do not reply.

"I forget. Yesterday at noon, perhaps."

"Heavens! Dick, you are a bad host. I have not breakfasted either."

I throw down my hat. "Pardon me, Ullathorne, you shall have some at once," and I ring the bell.

"Not unless you will eat with me."

"Are you not afraid that bread broken in such company will choke you?" I say, bitterly.

"No."

And when half an hour later we sit face to face with each other at the simple meal, for a moment I could almost persuade myself that the old halcyon days of friendship have returned.

CHAPTER IV.

"Dangerous conceits are in their natures poisons,
Which at the first are scarce found to distaste;
But with a little act upon the blood,
Burn like the mines of sulphur."

PART from Ullathorne with the understanding that we are to meet again at one o'clock. Eleven is striking as I take a latch-key from my pocket, and open the door of a small house that looks out on a corner of the Regent's Park.

It is a pretty, fantastic little cage—its owner could scarcely have counted the cost

when she offered to exchange it for my miserable rooms.

As I lay down my hat, the sound of a familiar voice proceeding from a room close by brings the blood leaping to my forehead. It is ten years since I heard those languid, refined tones, but time has touched neither their music, nor my hatred of the speaker. Before me are two doors, separate entrances to rooms that communicate with each other, I turn the handle of the one nearest to me, and enter.

But Mr. Titmarsh and Hagar are in the room beyond: myself invisible, I stand still for a moment to hear the completion of his speech.

"——here at once. And, indeed, my dear Hagar, I think I deserve some thanks for interesting myself thus on your behalf—to rise at so early an hour, and in such an inclement season, too; I have not done such a thing these twenty years."

"Why did you come?" she cries, fiercely. "What new plot is in your head now, I wonder? You can find some other instrument, for I'll lend myself to no more."

"Plots!" he says, in a tone of well-bred surprise. "I never plot, it is too much trouble. I have come to you to-day in the interests of morality—and your own; I assure you that in this instance the two are identical——"

"How dare you!" she cries, her voice like nothing so much as the track of a firefly on the air. "One more such speech and I will turn you out of this house with my own hands."

"I wish you would look at me again like that, Hagar," he says plaintively; "that last flash of your eyes positively warmed me. And a lovely woman never looks so lovely as when she is in a rage. We shall have some pic-

tures worth looking at when painters have really grasped that fact; and then your complexion, with all the glow coming from inside, instead of being deftly applied *out*, it is a real pleasure to look at you—but this by the way. To return—in the interests of morality it is desirable that your relations with Richard Sieviking should be placed on a different footing, and that is why I came here to see you this morning."

"Leave us to manage our own affairs," she says, sullenly. "We want no help, he nor I, from you."

"I confess I was *surprised*," he says, gently, "on passing his rooms late last night, to see you issuing from them. I felt that I could not be mistaken in that commanding figure, and took the liberty of following you home; hence my appearance here this morning. Yes, I must confess I did not expect to find

you on such friendly terms with the man who——"

"Silence!" she cries vehemently; "do not dare to say one word against him—*you*, who stand to me for everything he is not, while everything that he is you could never, never be!"

"So!" he exclaims, "you love him?"

There is a ring of hatred in his voice that startles me. Our own hatred for others always seems natural, while any sign of theirs for us usually takes us by surprise. She does not answer—I think she has turned impetuously away from him.

"I made the acquaintance of such a pretty creature three days ago," he says, with apparent irrelevance; "it was at an old-fashioned country house, over which she presided. I never saw anything more bewitching — and *young*, and after all youth and freshness please

some men more than the beauty, however magnificent, of maturer years."

"You are driving at something," she says, scornfully. "Speak out. Who was this girl?"

"Richard Sieviking's wife."

For a moment I hold my breath, expecting I know not what. Amazement fills me as she says, jealously, but with a voice that has no surprise in it,—

"And she is very pretty, you say?"

"Exquisitely so. And you knew this all the time?"

"Yes," she says, in a dull, hard tone, "I knew it."

"Of course it can be nothing to you," he goes on, smoothly, though I can detect a profound disappointment and even discomfiture in his tone, "for you are dead, you know. Let me see, my dear Hagar; you died

—and were buried—the 30th August, 187—, and Dick Sieviking was married the 15th of the following October. Quick work, but then he was in love."

"Bah!" she cries, jealously; "he never loved her as he loved me—never."

"Now do you know, Hagar, that I should be inclined to doubt very much if he ever really loved you. He was violently attracted by you at first sight, no doubt, but he cooled so very quickly——"

"That was because I did not love him," she says, doggedly, "or care to keep him *then*. Now, now——"

"Now he adores his wife," says Mr. Titmarsh, with a sneer; "and upon my word I don't wonder."

"He never sees her," she cries, swiftly. "Since he met me by chance, six months ago, he has never left town but twice,

and then only for a night. He has behaved all through like the man of honour that he is."

"Scarcely, I think. Really it went quite against my conscience to call her Mrs. Sieviking."

"Your conscience!" she cries, turning upon him like a tigress, "whose doing is the whole miserable business? If this poor fellow had been your enemy, if you had wished to wreck his life, I could understand it; but he was *nothing* to you. And as for me, cunning as you thought yourself, you could scarcely imagine that, my freedom regained, I should turn to *you*—you! when I had wilfully cut myself free of such a man as Richard Sieviking."

"Indeed, Hagar," he says, languidly, "of whatever service I may have been to you at a trying and difficult period of your life, I assure you I never had the remotest intention of

transferring your charms to myself. I always admired you very much, but whirlwinds are not comfortable to live with, and I prefer you —at a distance."

"You lie," she cries, fiercely. "When you followed me home, and used a hundred artifices to get speech with me, you were no valetudinarian, but a——"

"Spare me," he says, plaintively. "Really, Hagar, there is a nervous strength about your diction that reminds me of some savages with whom I had to deal many years ago. It is quite true that I followed you home; I was interested in you, and when I became better acquainted with you and your amiable mother —by the way, I hope she is well?"

"She is better than she ever was before—she is dead."

"Ah! To continue; it was not long before I was in possession of your story. You were

discontented, unhappy, sighing for luxuries and enjoyments placed entirely beyond your reach by a certain—circumstance. In the course of conversation one day I happened to mention a woman who, precisely in your position, delivered herself from it, reprehensibly no doubt, by her mother-wit. She was injured in a railway accident, the woman sitting beside her was killed—she caused the latter to be buried in her name, and the mistake, for the dead woman was a poor friendless creature, was never discovered. You seized upon the idea with avidity and—carried it out."

"By your help," she says, sullenly; "without it I could have done nothing."

"I admit," he says, calmly, "that after your —ah—demise, there were some trifling details to which I in a mere friendly spirit attended, but I did not approve, even though I acted

the part of father when, *en secondes noces*, you wedded the Russian count who was to provide you with everything that you desired—position—wealth—admiration; by the way, where is he now?"

"I left him," she says, calmy; "I wearied of the St. Petersburg life after a time; the splendid respectability of my life suffocated me—I came to England."

"And the fortunate man who accompanied you?"

"I came alone—believe that or not, as you please."

"I will try to do the former," he says, resignedly. "So that accounts for my receiving no reply to my letters to you for the last eight months. But somehow, when I heard that Richard Sieviking and his wife had parted, I instantly connected their separation with *you*. Curious that the first time I passed his

door I should see issuing from it the Countess Petrywalski."

"Say that you were spying on him," she cries, passionately; "and yet, *what* is it to you whether he sees me or not, ? What are our affairs to you in any way that you should meddle in them?"

"In the interests of morality, my dear Hagar," he says, and by his voice I know that he is speaking with half shut eyes, "it is desirable that *Mrs. Sieviking* should be awakened to a sense of her position. I may tell you in confidence that I am thinking of marrying and settling down in that neighbourhood myself, so that it would be *disagreeable* to have to keep up the farce any longer; and dangerous if it came out that a man of my well-known character connived at such doings. Therefore I am going to tell her; and I think such conduct very courageous on my part."

"Spare yourself the trouble," she says, indifferently; "no doubt, she knows it already."

"I think not," he says, quietly.

"I hate her," says Hagar, so low that I can scarcely hear her; "if killing her would give me his love I would crush her life out as one does the life from a fly." She pauses as one across whose mind has flashed a sudden memory. "Tell me," she cries, vehemently, "could a man maddened with drink and hatred, strangle a woman in the streets of London, before anyone had time to save her?"

"He might. Do you apprehend violence from some of your lovers? Pardon me that truth compels me to use the plural."

She draws her breath with a kind of shiver. "Perhaps," she says. "Well!" (with a bitter laugh), "as you reminded me just now, I grow old; I am nearly thirty-two years old—as well die that way as any other!"

"No," says Mr. Titmarsh, pleasantly, "you are too handsome to be disfigured by such a death. Well, I am going to Sieviking this afternoon, what do you say to accompanying me? I shall probably call on Mrs.—ah—Sieviking to-night, and she is really very pretty. I think you would feel it a positive pleasure to look at her. I am very honest to propose it, for, candidly, I don't think your opinion of me will be raised, though perhaps after to-night you will understand better the interest I take in the family of—Sieviking."

"Why should I go?" she says, bitterly. "If you had followed me in here last night you might have persuaded me to anything—I would have gone anywhere to be revenged on her, but now—now I have lost heart, and more, I will not a second time make of myself a tool in your hands. I will see her—never fear but I will see her, but not with you."

"Love has tamed you," he says, coldly, and by his voice I think he is rising, "nevertheless, I believe you will accompany me to-night." I do not wait to hear another syllable; noiselessly as I have entered, I leave the house, send a telegraphic message to Ullathorne, and in less than an hour am on my way to Sieviking.

CHAPTER V.

"Now I have tasted her sweet soul to the core,
All other depths are shallow; essences
Once spiritual, are like muddy lees."

THROUGH the schoolroom window the ruddy light of fire and candle shine, a beacon to my eyes as I cross the lawn.

Drawing near I look in and see that the interior is gaily decorated with holly and evergreens, while in the centre of the room a *tableau* in process of being enacted rivets my attention.

Some one has made a wreath of mistletoe

and set it on the head of a little fellow who is strutting up and down, uttering certain incomprehensible sounds that are received with hearty laughter by two young women who kneel on opposite sides of the hearth-rug—My Lady Green Sleeves and Florizel.

I say to myself, jealously, that the former has not altered in any one particular, that her face is as happy, her laughter as joyful, as when my place was by her side; but even as the thought comes to me, she catches the little toddler, as he passes, to her heart, and her eyes, looking straight over his head, seem to meet mine, and tell the world of misery that lies behind her momentary forgetfulness. When she lets him go, he crosses quite naturally to Florizel, who also gathers him up as though he were the only precious thing the world contained, and as he struggles out of her arms, having, like all brave boys, a hearty

contempt for kissing, I am able to note the changes that six months have made in *her*.

She has put off her robes of mourning since I saw her last; perhaps it is the change of dress that makes her appear younger; anyway, with this tender look on her face, she is sweeter, more attractive far in my eyes than she ever was before.

"Time for Dick to go to bed," I hear her say, as he escapes. "Let me take him up to-night, Charolais, and you rest quietly here."

She has risen, and crossing over to my darling, lays her hand upon the brown head with a gesture of love for which I bless her in my heart.

Green Sleeves looks up, and I know now that no jealousy breaks the perfect confidence that exists between them.

Meanwhile the child has approached the

window, and now, with his golden head pressed against the pane, seems to be looking into my face. Does he see me? At any rate he lifts a small forefinger, and, pointing it at me, calls out, "Papa, papa!"

I tremble beneath the actual sound of the little voice that night by night I have so vainly imagined, but as Florizel advances I draw back.

"No, no," she says, gently, "not papa, little one," and takes him up in her arms and carries him away.

A minute, and the room is empty, but while I am still hesitating as to whether I shall go round to the other side of the house and enter openly, Green Sleeves returns, and sits down in her usual place.

She looks around as though to make sure that there is no one by to observe her, then draws from her bosom a locket, holds it for

a moment unopened in her hand, then touches the spring, and I know that if I could see her downcast eyes, I should find nothing but love, pure love, for the pictured face within.

So for once she can forget her boy to think of the father . . . O! Green Sleeves, poor little heart, you little know with what a message of evil that father is now making his way towards you.

The door is ajar, I push it open and enter. Have her ears grown dull that she does not hear me coming, that I have actually reached her side before she looks up and sees me?

Some such look as might grow in a woman's eyes if her passionately regretted dead were suddenly restored to her, I see in those of my darling as I kneel beside her, and not daring to touch her hand or her robe, struggle with dry lips to utter her name.

"Green Sleeves," I say, and my voice is harsh from the intense effort to speak; "I have brought you bad news—that is why I have broken my promise to you and am here to-night."

"Bad news?" she says, and I seem to have forgotten how sweet her voice is as I now hear her; "there can never be any more bad news for me, however long I live."

"Can you think of nothing worse, Green Sleeves, than losing my love?"

"Nothing."

"There has been no disgrace to you in our changed circumstances. The dishonour has all been mine. Could you bear to have the finger of scorn pointed at you by the world, and our child—O! heavens, our child branded with a life-long stain?"

"He has done nothing," she says, trembling. "No one would be so cruel as to punish him

for your sin. . . . O! what fresh misery have you brought down upon him and on me?"

"It is nothing new," I say, wearily; "it is only the accursed fruit of a mad folly committed years ago, and that until six months ago I had thought dead and buried. . . . Green Sleeves, can't you guess, can't you think at all what it is that I am going to tell you?"

"No," she says, almost in a whisper, "I can't. . . ."

"Then," I say, desperately, "I must say it out without help, and if it kills you, Green Sleeves, if it kills you. . . . Child, you are not my wife, and our boy . . . O! God! our boy, he has no legal right to the name he bears."

My head falls forward on her lap; I cannot, I dare not look at her.

"So it was your wife, only your wife who separated us six months ago?"

"Only my wife? O! Green Sleeves! Yes,

it was no one else. She pretended to be dead for her own ends, but one night I met her."

"You used not to love her," she says, turning her head away, but I see the colour creeping over her neck. "Do you love her now?"

"You know better than that," I say, sternly. "But is your heart broken, Green Sleeves, and can you ever forgive me the wrong I have unconsciously done you and the child?"

"Dick, did you ever kiss her since you thought you married me?"

"My lips have never touched hers, or any woman's, since I parted from you six months ago."

"And is that all your bad news, Dick?" she says, still with her face turned away.

"All! O! Green Sleeves, is it not enough?"

But as she does not move or speak, I say to myself that it is because she cannot, . . . that

as she realises the whole force of the truth, she is stunned by it beyond the power of expression.

"I have never brought you anything but pain and misery," I say slowly; "now I bring you shame, . . . and all my love is powerless to shield you, Green Sleeves."

"Your love?" she says, in a very low voice, "and do you love me still, Dick? After all these months in which I sent you no word, no sign, any more than if you had been *dead?*"

I do not answer her, for she has turned; we are face to face, and then—what is this that nestles and clings about my neck as though it had found its rightful home at last, and would never let go of it again unless Death himself should come to tear her away?

"O! Green Sleeves," I say desperately, as we cling together, "you must not kiss me—

you must not; we are not husband and wife now, we are only sweethearts."

"I don't care! I don't care!" she cries, her lovely flushed face pressed against mine; "you love me, and that is enough. . . . You are *my* Dick—my very own, not that other woman's. . . . O! Dick, Dick!" . . . and then she has no more words ready, only her heart, as it leaps against mine, tells all, and more than all, of her content.

There let her nestle, let her cling; Fate may surely spare us these few moments together out of the lifetime we are doomed to live apart.

This is our last feast of love, and in it there shall be no stint—lip to lip, eye to eye, we will pour out our whole hearts like water, seeking only to outvie one another in the riches brought by each. . . . We will set free the prisoned love-words that have turned back

frozen on our lips during the past weary months, till we grow dumb from excess of language, and of each other's faces we will take so long, so deep a fill as shall last us through that long to-morrow in which we shall thirst, and be an hungered for a sight of them.

I tear my eyes from my darling to look at the clock, and see that in less than twenty minutes Hagar and Mr. Titmarsh will be here.

"Love," I say, "you do not know the worst yet. I should not come here to tell you this to-night, but that *she* is on the way to do so herself, or rather Mr. Titmarsh brings her—Mr. Titmarsh, who originated and enabled her to carry out the whole deception."

Our half-hour of happiness, snatched from Time, is over, my arms relax their hold, hate seizes and knits up each nerve and muscle, but a moment ago unstrung in

strengthless relaxation of love. Through my veins leaps like fire the longing for revenge upon this wretch who has ruined my life both in youth and manhood; he is old and I am young, but before God I doubt my own strength to keep my hands off him when we come face to face to-night.

"You shall not see them, little one," I say, recalled to myself by her startled face; "leave me to deal with that scoundrel—he will be here very soon now, or I'm much mistaken."

A light step behind me; I turn to see—Florizel.

"Dick!" she cries, the word forced from her by the surprise of the moment; then a great light of hope and joy spreads over her face, she hurries forward and looks from me to Green Sleeves, and from Green Sleeves back again to me.

"You are . . . *happy?*" she cries.

"O! yes, we are happy," says Green Sleeves, leaving me to throw her arm around Florizel; "it was all a mistake, dear, he never loved any one but me—never, never! . . . that woman was only his wife."

"His wife!" repeats Florizel, looking bewildered; "but she is dead—she was buried."

"She was buried," says Green Sleeves, lucidly; "but she was not dead, you know—she is alive now, and then she came back, and what could Dick do, poor fellow, but give me up?"

"O! Dick," says Florizel, taking my hand in both hers, while tears and laughter shine together in her eyes; "why did you not tell us this in the first place, and why if your wife is alive are you here to-day, sir?"

Green Sleeves has got hold of my other hand, and is kissing and mumbling it with all

her might; surely no man ever had four such loving, forgiving eyes looking at once into his face, none ever had such utter love from two such faithful women as stand one on either side of me at this moment.

"My dear ones," I say, "I was a coward; I lacked moral courage, and it seemed to me so much worse a thing that my boy and his mother should be turned out of their home with no legal right to the name they bore, than that certain loving women should think me a guilty, contemptible wretch, especially as I was never at any time worthy of their good opinion."

"I never could understand it," says Florizel; "and O! poor Dick, how you must have suffered and what names I called you—but though I tried my very hardest to despise you, somehow there was something in your face that *would* not let me."

"I think you succeeded pretty well, Flo-

rizel," I say, sadly; "hark! what was that? Can they have arrived *already?*"

A confused noise is audible in the distance, hurried steps traverse the passage, the door is thrown violently back, and Ullathorne enters hastily.

"They will be here in five minutes, if not sooner," he says, advancing; "I managed to borrow a man's horse at the station and rode ahead of them. Charolais," he turns to her, "forgive my discourtesy," and he takes her hand, with an earnest look at her face that grows brighter as it rests there, "and Florizel, too——"

Their eyes meet in warm friendliness. "But Dick," he draws me aside, "what does it all mean? You telegraphed that Mr. Titmarsh would probably go to Sieviking by next train, which, if possible, I must catch, but strange to say he has brought *her*."

"Ullathorne, that is my wife."

"What!"

"It was all a hoax; she was not dead. I could not tell the truth because of Charolais and the child. And though you have seen her at my rooms she has been no more to me than the utterest stranger."

For a moment he stands incapable of speech, then the mists of wonder clear from his eyes, and in their place shines out the love, tried and faithful of years.

"Dick!"

Our hands meet. . . . O! friend, friend, shall I say that my friendship for you is less than my love for my darling yonder, or that hers is greater for me than is that of the noblest woman-friend a man ever had?

"Charolais must not see them," he says, a moment later, "and you are not to be trusted. Your hatred of the man may betray you into

some act of violence. By anticipating his news, you have broken his weapon in his hand—he can only slink away like the cur that he is."

"Dick," says my darling, approaching me "I want you to grant me a request, dear—the last, perhaps, I shall ever ask you. Will you let me see Mr. Titmarsh, and—*her*, when they come?"

"No, no," I cry, vehemently; "it is impossible. He would only insult you, and perhaps she, too, might——"

"They are coming here to triumph over me," she says, with a flash of the old spirit in her voice, "and if I could show him that I knew it already, and that I feared neither of them, it would discomfit him so, and I should like to see—*her*."

Her head droops, the colour comes into her face. . . . I cannot bear the idea of my darling

meeting Hagar, but it would be sweet to dash the cup of triumph from Mr. Titmarsh's lips untasted, and I should be close at hand to defend her. . . .

"Let Charolais receive the villain," exclaims Ullathorne. "Is there no room with an inner one where you could hear all that passes?"

"There is the one that Mr. Titmarsh used to occupy, with the conservatory beyond. I saw the firelight in the window as I passed."

"The boys have been decorating it," says Green Sleeves, with such a flush on her cheek, and light in her eye, as bodes ill to Mr. Titmarsh, or I am much mistaken.

"Quick, then," cries Ullathorne, "I hear wheels; there is not a moment to lose."

A minute later and I am in the dark conservatory alone, where not only can I hear

but see all that passes, while in the room beyond My Lady Green Sleeves, standing on the hearthrug, with beating pulses awaits the arrival of her visitors.

CHAPTER VI.

"How doth the married woman?"

AH! madam," says Mr. Titmarsh, entering lightly, "I deeply regret that I should have occasion to come to you on so sad an errand as the present, but this injured lady"—he leads forward a figure cloaked from head to foot, and closely veiled—"has entreated my help; and, thinking it better that the truth should be broken to you by a member of the family than a stranger, I have put self on one side, and am here."

My Lady Green Sleeves bows—she was

always full of grace—but whence comes this proud and gentle dignity that might make you forget how ruffled is the silk of her hair, how simple the gown that clings to her young and slender shape?

"It is my unhappy lot, madam," he says, in tones of the deepest feeling, "to name this lady to you in a manner that will sound an insult to yourself, but I have no choice. This is——"

"Richard Sièviking's wife," says My Lady Green Sleeves, quietly.

"What!" cries Mr. Titmarsh, starting back, a glare of baffled rage overspreading the face that the past years have left untouched save for an increased yellowness of hue, "you have known it all the time, madam, and yet have been able to reconcile it with your conscience to take this lady's place, to bear her very name, appropriating to yourself the rights and privileges that were hers?"

But Green Sleeves turns from him with a gesture as though some creeping thing were nigh her, towards the tall figure that stands a little apart, as though disdaining the help she was said to have demanded.

"O! madam," she says gently, "how came you to become the tool of this bad man? For I cannot think that you know who and what he is. He formerly lived in this house as the step-father of Richard Sieviking, whom he robbed of his inheritance, casting him and his brothers and sisters penniless on the world, and from the place to which he now insolently returns, secure in the absence of his master, he was ten years ago thrust out with the scorn and contumely that befitted the exodus of the embezzler and the thief. Alas! that he should find ready to his hand the only instrument that the whole world could have furnished with which to do the man he hated such an injury!"

With a sudden movement Hagar frees herself from the cloak and hood in which she is shrouded, and her beauty seems to flame out like a jewel from a background of darkness as she turns upon Mr. Titmarsh with a gesture imperial in its superb scorn.

"And so you have been using me all this while for the purpose of *revenge!*" she says, her voice intense as the sob of the wind that sweeps up before the storm; "it was because you hated him—him whose name you professed not even to know; that you originated and carried out the false story of my death! O! heavens, to be made the dupe of such as you—coward, liar! *thief!*"

She hisses the last word in his ear with such violence that he seems literally to stagger under it for a moment, then he smiles.

"Still the same redundancy of language, my dear Hagar," he says, pleasantly; "but I

believe we did not come here to bandy compliments, though if you and—ah—I am ignorant of this young lady's name—are going to make common cause over my fancied delinquencies, I will retire."

"No!" I say, entering from the conservatory, "you will remain precisely so long as it suits my pleasure."

The sneer dies on his lips; for a moment he stands the image of detected guilt and discomfiture, the next he has recovered himself, and advances in good order, the mask readjusted on his face, and smiling.

"Ah! you here?" he says, in a tone of affected surprise; "really a most fortunate coincidence; matters can be settled between the—ah—wives so much better now that the mutual husband is present."

"One more insult of that sort," I say, striding towards him, "and your years shall not

protect you from the soundest thrashing a scoundrel ever had. What! are you not satisfied with being kicked out of Sieviking *once?*"

He retreats before me, but covers this retrograde movement admirably by seating himself in an easy chair hard by, whence he makes us an exquisite bow.

"You will excuse me," he says, plaintively, "but I am not so young as I was, and these family rows are apt to be lengthened affairs, and we are all in the family here; pray make yourself quite at home, Hagar—Mrs. Sieviking, I mean. You must try and get used to the place of which you will in future be mistress."

Hitherto I have not looked at Hagar; now I turn to her, but she cowers away from me with such shame in her whole shrinking figure, as surely it is strange so guilty a woman should know.

"Poor wretch!" I say, looking at her with a disgust so profound as almost to touch pity, "from your first pursuit of me for greed, to this last cowardly assumption of rights that you know you do not possess, what a contemptible, downward course your so-called love for me has run!"

I go up to My Lady Green Sleeves, and as I put my arm round her, she nestles to my side, looking up in my face with as pure a glance of love and pride as any she ever gave me in the honoured days of her wifehood.

"Yes, this is love," I say, looking down on her; "pure and strong, faithful and tender, a crown of glory to the man upon whom it is bestowed; he could surely make her no other return than perfect constancy, or fail to love her as I love thee, my little one, my heart!"

With a terrible cry of "I am your wife!" Hagar throws herself between us, and thrusting

Green Sleeves from my side, with savage strength grips my hands to her breast as she falls at my feet and crouches there, her magnificent head flung back, her eyes seeking mine with a desperate hunger and despair such as one may see in those of a trapped and starving animal.

"Say that you loved me once," she cries, "that the love now hers was once mine, and I can bear it; but do not deny that I was once dear enough to you to be made your wife!"

"I never loved but one woman in my life," I say, sternly, "and she is yonder. What your future was before I married you, God knows; something of what it has been since you set yourself free of me by a criminal deception I have learnt to-day, and of that knowledge I shall avail myself to obtain a separation from you by the laws of France."

Her head falls forward on her hands, her

hair sweeps my feet as it sinks lower and lower.

"Had we been married in England I could divorce you easily; as it is, I can prevent your sullying any longer the name my real wife has served but to honour."

"I am your real wife," she says, lifting her head; "and by the laws of France you can never marry another woman as long as I live."

"You cannot hinder our loving each other," I say, looking across at my darling, who stands apart—and is it pity for this poor wretch that I see in her dark eyes?

"She will not leave you now," cries Hagar; "*I* would not for fifty wives if you loved me . . . honour . . . it is a cold love than which honour is stronger, and so you will be happy together, while I . . ."

She falls forward and lies face downwards

along the ground, writhing as one put to intolerable pain; and what is this slight figure that kneels beside her, with a pitying hand laid on the darkness of this woman's head?

She looks up for a moment: I tremble, believing she is about to strike my darling, then she shrinks away, a kind of wonder growing in her splendid eyes.

"Do you know what I am?" she says, harshly; "that I am bad—bad . . . not like you, but he loved me once . . . do not believe him if he says he did not."

She sits up, her eyes clinging jealously to Green Sleeves' face, who still kneels beside her.

"You are very pretty," she says, slowly, "and your hair," she puts out her hand and touches one of those soft brown rings, "is like silk, but you are not beautiful. Until last night I did

not know that such a woman existed as you, and if I could have got at you then . . ."

She looks away from Green Sleeves to me, and a sudden jealousy grows in her eyes as she turns them back again to my darling.

"It is because you are so sure of his love that you can be kind to me," she says, dully; "I might like you if it were not for that—as it is, each kind word you say to me makes me hate you more."

"These private theatricals are very entertaining," says Mr. Titmarsh, looking at his watch, "and my artistic sense is too fine to wish to bring them to an abrupt termination; but time passes, and unless Mrs. Sieviking proposes to remain here to-night, we have only ten minutes left before starting to catch the train back to town."

"*We!*" cries Hagar, rising to her feet, and turning on him a look of the fiercest loathing.

"I would walk barefoot every step of the way rather than endure one mile of it in your company. Go, and leave me to return as I best may—devil!"

"Perhaps you and your husband will arrange your little differences of opinion, and you will—remain," he says, pleasantly, as he rises and buttons his overcoat across his chest. "If so, I shall consider myself fortunate in having been instrumental in so suitable an arrangement of the present—ah!—somewhat awkward circumstances."

And with a bow of the deepest irony, he turns towards the door.

"One moment," I say. "You will probably hear more of this business shortly. Unless I am much mistaken, your performances in Paris have placed you within reach of the law."

"I think not," he says, smiling. "Indeed,

I may say I am certain you can prove nothing against me, and the statements of a woman of Mrs. Sieviking's antecedents would scarcely be believed against a person of *mine*, for the public does not share your extremely violent views with regard to the Sieviking property. But of course you will do no harm in trying, . . . though I should advise you not, for hitherto, Dick, in any little contest that has arisen between us, I have invariably—*won*."

He is standing on the very spot where, ten years ago, he swore to be even with me, and I laughed aloud for scorn to think that so poor a thing as he could work me any further harm.

For a moment he glances from one to another with a mocking smile, then the door closes; he is gone.

Hagar's whole frame seems to shrink as he

disappears, an expression of the bitterest hatred flits across her face.

"That I should have been made the tool of such as he, and against *you*," she says, between her set teeth, then stoops for her cloak, and swiftly wraps it around her.

"I can do you no more harm," she says, looking with a certain hard indifference at us as we stand together, "and now you will be happy, I suppose. . . ."

"No, madam," says Green Sleeves, sorrowfully, "we shall never be *happy* again, . . . he and I part for ever to-night."

"You *part?*" she cries, incredulously. "What! loving each other as you do, you will part?"

But my darling, as she clings to my hand, looking up in my face, answers her never a word.

O! that in this terrible farewell so near at

hand she and I might die together, and so the long struggle, and the sin, and the suffering, be over!

For a moment Hagar's eyes soften. Then, as I put my arm round Green Sleeves with a gesture of passionate love, her face darkens with a sullen jealousy; she draws her hood forward, and turns to the door.

On the threshold she pauses, looks back at us with an intent gaze, then wrapping her cloak more closely about her, shivers and turns away.

BOOK VI.

CHAPTER I.

"Nae living man I'll love again,
Since that my lovely knight is slain;
Wi' ae lock o' his yellow hair
I'll chain my heart for evermair."

SPRING—not in the haunts where she shows a different mood a hundred times a day, but in the Park, where she has but one smile, one robe, in which, like many another young beauty, she is admired precisely so long only as her freshness lasts.

Beneath the mingled sunlight and the shadow of the stripling leaves comes the Jersey Lily, the prettiest creature, methinks, I ever saw, save my Charolais.

And here, too, comes Hetty with Siva at her side, and when she spies me with Ullathorne she reins up, and as I live puts her arm round my neck, and kisses me in the face of all the world.

"I don't care," she says, as Ullathorne suggests that people may suppose me to be an admirer; "anyone can see he is my brother; and O! Dick," she drops her voice, "why did you not tell me the truth last summer at Sievi-king, and not make us all so utterly wretched about you?"

She only arrived in town last night, and this is our first meeting.

"We had no idea how fond we all were of you," she says, shaking her head; "it nearly

broke Jill's heart when she could go to see you no longer, because she ran up against that—*person* at your rooms."

"And I had no idea I was so fond of a certain fine lady," I say, laughing; "really, it's very pleasant to be received into the bosom of the family again."

"If only you could get a divorce," says Hetty, in a whisper, as she stoops to pat her Arab's satin neck; "and, O! Dick, don't you think I've grown considerably *thinner?*" she adds, in her usual tone, as she sits erect and straightens out her pretty, plump form.

"You are almost transparent, Hetty," I say, gravely; "soon we shall be able to see through you," and then she goes off laughing, and Ullathorne and I proceed on our way.

"Siva does not love you," he says, presently; "the stupid fellow has got it into his head that the whole business is your fault; and, don't

be in a rage, Dick, but I do believe he means to try and persuade Charolais to—marry him."

"*What!*"

If a bullet had crashed through my brain I could not for the moment be more completely stunned than I am by Ullathorne's words. The next, I realise that which has never so much as occurred to me before, how that Green Sleeves is free as any unwed maiden to marry whom she pleases, and how only by a tie that may grow weak with time, her *love*, is she in any sense bound to me.

Think of it—another man speaking to her of marriage, my wife . . . the mother of my boy; the thought is madness——

"Dick," cries Ullathorne overtaking me, for in my excitement I have devoured the ground with my strides; "surely you are not so foolish as to be jealous of *him?* Why, Charolais would not hear a syllable, I doubt if

she would even give him an interview, for she is very sensitive about seeing strangers now."

"But it might happen some day that someone else should love her, and she might listen," I say, still striding on. "O! Ullathorne, you have opened out to me such a hell as will never permit me to know peace again."

"I was an idiot to tell you," says Ullathorne, vexedly; "I thought it a piece of very bad taste on Siva's part to be so keen about seeing her—and though some people admire that sort of faithful love, I, for one, *don't;* but as to attaching the slightest importance to his intentions, who would think of such a thing?"

"Ullathorne, where is she now?"

"Dick—don't ask me that."

"When did you see her last?"

"Yesterday."

"Then she must be in town, for I saw you in the morning. Did she send me a message?"

"Yes—it was in rhyme. She bade me say—

"She sends you the ring frae her finger,
The garland frae her hair;
She sends you the heart within her breast,
And what would you have mair?"

"I was going to give you that message to-morrow."

"God bless her. She is well?"

"Yes—and happy. So different a creature to what she was at Sieviking after you left, that each time I see her I deplore that long miserable misunderstanding—it seems as though she could bear anything now that she knows herself secure of her love."

"Thank God for that," I say; but in my heart I am thinking how differently women feel things to men.

Through all the time that I believed her love for me dead, I never suffered so intensely,

longed for her so passionately, as I do now that I know every beat of her heart is for me, that I am in her thoughts morning, noon, and night, while my name is ever uttered in tones of love by her lips.

True, she has our boy, while I have nothing; but were he with me always, he could never satisfy the restless fever of a love that is eating my very life and strength away.

"Ullathorne," I say abruptly, as we leave the Park, "what harm could there be in my seeing her now and then—before people?"

"Don't think of it," he cries vehemently; "surely that fearful scene at Sieviking, when you bade each other farewell, sufficiently showed you your own weakness, Dick? If it did not, it should have done."

When I laid my darling in Florizel's arms, and kissed her there, and she clung to me, and I tore myself away, to come back, and

come back again, till at length by sheer force Ullathorne seized and dragged me out of the house—surely I learned then the danger of seeing again one who, my wife yesterday, is set further from me than the merest stranger to-day.

"Tell her that I got her message . . ." I say, as Ullathorne leaves me at my own door, "and that my answer to it is the first verse of her own ballad. I feel pretty sure that she is staying with you and Hetty; but do not be afraid, I shall not go to your house until you ask me."

CHAPTER II.

"I canna choose, but ever will
Be loving to thy father still:
Whaur-e'er he gae, whaur-e'er he ride,
My love with him doth still abide;
In weal or woe, whaur-e'er he gae,
Mine heart can ne'er depart him frae."

WILIGHT is closing in—I shut the book that I have been making a pretence of studying, and my thoughts fly to her upon whom not an hour ago my eyes rested—My Lady Green Sleeves.

As I passed the Ullathornes' house in Piccadilly, from the other side of the way, I

looked up at it, and lo! at that moment she came to an upper window with her boy in her arms, and for a minute those two pretty heads leaned against the pane, looking out at the young green of the Park beyond; then they went away, and I said to myself, trembling, that surely instinct might have told her I was near at hand—love have had power to draw her eyes to mine as I stood below. What is she doing to-night? Will they leave her at home, fearful of her meeting me abroad, or take her with them, doubting my strength to keep away from the house that contains her?

Ullathorne was right, there could be no safety in our meeting; friendship alone is a mockery betwixt her and me; the mere momentary sight of her face to-night has roused me almost to madness. Only half-a-dozen streets away, and we are as utterly sepa-

rated as though she were above ground, I beneath it . . . but soon this torture of knowing her so near to me will be removed, for did not Ullathorne say, "I was going to give you her message to-morrow"? which means that she is only in town for to-night, and that by to-morrow she will be far beyond my reach again.

Is she thinking of me now as I am of her? Does my near presence press on her as heavily as does hers on me? If by strong longing two people could make themselves present to each other, then I should be at her side, or she would be at mine at this moment.

The door opens gently. Have I indeed gone mad, or does my excited brain conjure up the vision of my Lady Green Sleeves with some heavy burden clasped in her arms, standing on the threshold?

I have not power to stir; but as she comes forward I know that this is no spirit, but my darling, and that the burden in her arms is our child . . . O! Green Sleeves, as well had you entered a lion's den as come here to me to-night!

"Dick," she says, with a kind of fear in her voice, as I do not move, only look up at her, "do not be angry with me for coming . . . but I have been so insulted . . . I felt as if I *must* come straight away to you . . . and I will get back again before Hetty and Ullathorne come in. . . ."

I have risen now, and set her in my chair, she is in her dinner dress of white silk, with a cloak thrown over that hides it almost entirely.

"See," she says, drawing the dark folds aside to show me the beautiful rosy child sound asleep on her breast, "when . . . when

he had gone I took my little one out of his cot, wrapping him in my cloak, and stole downstairs, meeting no one by the way, and came to you, dear. . . . O! anyone may behave to me as he pleases now, for I have no one to protect me!"

I see that she is trembling violently, that her cheeks are crimson with shame, while in her eyes is a look of outrage that turns my blood to fire.

"Who has dared to insult you?" I cry. "What! is there any man of Ullathorne's acquaintance so base as to take advantage thus of your defenceless position? Before heaven, I will read him such a lesson as shall make any other man chary of molesting you."

"If you look like that," she says, trembling still more, "I can never tell you, and I see now that I was wrong, very wrong, to come off to you. . . . but O! Dick, Dick! just *think* of it,

a person going down on his knees and asking me to *marry* him!"

"And was that all, Green Sleeves?"

"All?" she says, with a face of such horror as brings the ghost of a smile to my lips, "that someone should ask your wife . . . but no, I am not that . . . O! I thought I should have *died* of shame!"

"Perhaps he meant no insult, Green Sleeves. Remember that you are free to marry him, or any other man, if you please."

She looks up at me for a moment, then her dark eyes fill with tears.

"I will go away again," she says, with a sob in her voice; "for O! I think your insult to me is even greater than was Lord Siva's."

"It was Siva?" I exclaim.

"Yes," she says, her pride keeping back her tears; "since he did no harm in asking me, why should you not know his name?"

As she seeks to rise, the child stirs and half opens his eyes.

"Give him to me," I say, taking him from her arms, and before she can prevent me I have carried him into the other room, and laid him on my bed.

I cover him carefully over; his drowsy eyes close, he is sound asleep again in a moment.

"Our talking disturbs him; he will sleep better there," I say, as I go back to my darling, whose face has become almost as white as her gown, the one I gave her in which to go bravely to Hetty's three years ago,

With gold embroidered gorgeously,

and out of which her bosom and arms gleam like living snow.

"It is time we returned," she says, timidly, as I take her hand, and lead her to the chair, from which she has risen.

"They will not be back yet," I say, looking

at my watch; then stooping to pick up her cloak, I fold it neatly, and put it on one side. I think she watches me with a kind of fear, and when I sit down beside her she does not look up.

"And so you will not marry Siva, Green Sleeves?"

She does not answer, only in the growing darkness I see her head droop a little lower, her slender hands twist themselves together.

"But then you never liked him, Green Sleeves, and his persisting in his entreaties has only made you despise him more. Some day a man may love you whom you do not despise, and whom you will learn to love, for you have done no harm, child, and you are lovely and sweet enough to take any man's fancy, and what would you say then?"

"Do you give me leave to say Yes," she

cries, in a voice of agony, "if that time eve comes?"

"If that time ever comes—yes. You must not regard an honourable offer of marriage as an insult. Remember that you are now exposed to the love of any man who pleases to offer it to you, for I cannot protect you, Green Sleeves . . . and do you think that your love for me is such that you will be able to live out the rest of your life on the memory of it?"

"I was going to say," she says, slowly, "that just so long as your love for me will last, so will mine for you . . . but that is not true, for you are a man, and men sometimes change, while I——"

"Love," I say, gently, "you will never have a chance of doubting again whether my love for you will last till my life's end, for till that end comes, or till God calls you, sweetheart, you and I shall never part. We have said our

last farewells, now . . . *now*," I snatch her in my arms; "not one word will we utter but words of welcome, of reunion; we will forget the past year as though it were a dream, and be happy . . . happy . . ."

"Happy," she echoes, shivering in my embrace, and seeking to struggle away out of it; then in a voice of despair, "O! what madness brought me to you here to-night?"

Through the gloom I see her eyes gazing at me wild and wide, in them the look of a woman who knows her mastery over the man in whose power she is, to be gone, whose only weapon against his strength is her weakness, as her only chance of salvation are those prayers to which passion has rendered him deaf as the dead.

"Do not tremble, little one," I say, gently; "did I ever hurt one hair of this pretty head? And none shall ever again speak to

thee of love, sweetheart, save him that thou lovest!"

"Love you?" she says, almost in a whisper, "yes, I love you now for your honour, courage, nobility—for the fortitude with which you have borne an unhappy fate, and however noble or good a man may be, I say to myself always, 'He is not like my darling' . . . and so you will let me keep my good opinion of you, and love you still, and I will forget these wild words that my own folly has forced from your lips to-night. . . ."

"O! Green Sleeves," I say, grimly, "you will not make me barter you away for your good opinion—I have got you now, and I mean to keep you. We shall go away together this very night, for soon some one will be coming in search of you, and any man who dares challenge my right to my own, why, leave me to reckon with him."

"And is my love of no price to you?" she cries; "do you value my body more than my soul? I tell you that if you force me away with you to my own degradation and yours, you will bitterly repent it, for I shall despise you . . . and what happiness shall we find in our guilt if we have not even love wherewith to sweeten it?"

"I have enough for both," I say; "and as to your hatred, why, Green Sleeves, I do not fear it—I know your heart better than that."

"And it is all my doing," she cries, passionately, "all . . . no one will believe that I did not come here to persuade you to go away with me, and I shall be disgraced in everyone's eyes—in Florizel's—for ever."

"No," I say, some of the rapture within me breaking out in my voice; "they shall know the truth when we are—away."

"You cannot force me to go away with

you," she says, trembling; "unless you use violence I shall find means to escape you. . . . O! Dick, that it should come to my longing to escape from *you*, as though you were my bitterest enemy!"

"You could make a scene," I say, quietly, "but who would dare to meddle with you, or take you from under my care? I should tell them that you were my wife, and no one would raise a finger to help you. Green Sleeves . . . sweetheart, how dully your heart beats . . . not one leap or thrill of joy that we are together at last. . . ."

"No," she says, "it will never beat high for joy of being with you till I can come to you with *honour*. How shall we be happy? I despising you for so degrading me, you scorning me for, however unwillingly, yielding to you. . . . O! it would be hell, and it would but end in our parting again, a

million times more wretched than we are now."

"Death may part us," I say, rashly, "but none else ever shall."

At this moment we hear the sound of hurried footsteps on the stairs—another instant, and Ullathorne is in the room.

CHAPTER III.

"He's ta'en her by the milk-white hand,
And by the grass-green sleeve,
He's mounted her hie behind himsel',
At her kinsmen speired nae leave."

THE room is in darkness save for the light afforded by the street lamps without, but Green Sleeves' white dress reveals her, and with a sudden exclamation Ullathorne advances.

I do not relax my hold of her by one hair's breadth, but a bitter pang runs through me as she holds out both hands to him and strives to escape from my arms.

"Take me away with you," she cries,

faintly; "it is not his fault, I sought him . . . I came to him here . . . O! Dick, have mercy, and let me go."

"Thank God that you did not take her from my house, Dick," cries Ullathorne. "When I returned home to find her missing —for somehow I have been restless about her all the evening, and I left Hetty at the theatre, and came back alone—I *could* not believe you capable of that dishonour, and yet I felt certain she must be with you."

"Siva molested her," I say, curtly; "but neither he nor any other will have a chance of doing so again; for the future she remains—with me."

"No, no," cries Green Sleeves, in a voice of anguish; "O! do not punish my act of folly, of madness so heavily . . . do not heed him, Ullathorne; he is not himself to-night, and the fault is all mine, not his!"

"Dick," says Ullathorne, impetuously; "you will not surely take so base an advantage of this poor child's trust in you—would she have come to you to-night had she not put implicit faith in your honour? I always knew the danger there would be in your meeting, and if the sight of her has for a moment obscured your better reason, never think, friend, that we shall despise you for it . . . only let her come away home with me before her absence has created a scandal."

"Whatever scandal there may be she shall never hear it," I say, calmly; "go your ways, Ullathorne, and do not seek to meddle between us—nor you nor any other man living shall tear her from my arms now."

"O! Charolais," he cries, groaning; "what unhappy fate drove you to this house to-night—there must have been some madness working in his veins before you came, that in a

moment he should thus cast honour, self-respect, courage to the winds!"

"If *her* words have not moved me," I say, indifferently, "you may be sure that yours will not. And now, these are my rooms; this is my wife—leave us."

"Never. If needs be I will take her from you by force. I will summon help and overpower you, but I will not leave her here against her will—against your honour—all."

"Let us see which be the stronger, then," I say.

Before Green Sleeves can utter a cry, or he make more than one step forward to stay me, I have opened the door behind me, thrust her into the room beyond, locked her in, and wrenched out the key.

"Now take her from me if you are able," I say, setting my back against it. "To that

room there is no ingress save by a grated window, or over my body."

"I can wait," says Ullathorne, sadly, "and she—love will give her patience to wait also. To-morrow's sun will bring different counsels to those that the shock of seeing her has betrayed your heart into giving you to-night. Dick, can you bear to fall so low in the eyes of one who has hitherto so looked up to, and worshipped you?"

"I can bear anything but to go on living without her," I say, harshly. "For God's sake keep your platitudes to yourself, or you'll turn a desperate man into a madman."

"Better to be actually mad, to have lost control of the reason bestowed by God for your guidance than in your senses to commit the cowardly, dishonourable deed you meditate! Dick, is it *you* who would so betray this tender, delicate creature, so utterly de-

pendent on your honour, and whom by every law of love and right you are called upon to protect even from yourself?"

"She loves me," I say, doggedly, "and would soon forgive me . . . our lives are unendurable apart. What would the crying out of the whole world matter if we were happy in one another, as we should be, *shall* be?"

"The world is nothing," he says; "your own hearts would be your accusers. And Charolais is intensely sensitive; she feels her position most keenly now, when she has done no wrong, and in the eyes of all is free of the slightest stain, how would she bear those daily stabs of scorn and condemnation from which all your love would not have power to shield her?"

I answer him nothing, and he goes on again.

"Then there is something more than the

chance of discovering in your wife's antecedents some previous ceremony or marriage that would make yours with her invalid, and if this should be proved, will you ever forgive yourself for this premature seizure of that which you covet? will you ever find in her company one-half the sweetness that would be yours had you waited till she could go to you honorably?"

"There is small chance of such happiness, and you know it, Ullathorne. You say this but to tempt me."

"No, before heaven," he cries, vehemently. "I have been taking certain steps lately; believe me, Dick, that I seem to see the day not so far distant when I shall see you and Charolais restored to each other's love and *honour* yet."

"And I," I say, slowly, "see nothing—nothing but that I have her here, safe as any

pretty, timid bird, and you bid me open my hand to let it fly away from me—for ever."

"And even if it did," he cries, coming up to me, his voice full of urgent strong entreaty, "would not that be better far than to cage, and day by day see it pine and wither away unable to draw a free breath in the stifling, impure air of *dishonour?*"

"She would be happy," I say, in a voice that I strive vainly to harden, "love such as mine *must* content her—it shall."

"Never," he says, sadly; "and your love will become a curse to you when you find how by its indulgence you have only purchased her contempt. Hitherto your love has been her pride, her glory . . . Dick—friend, let it so remain to the end if you ever valued the purest, truest heart woman ever gave!"

"I cannot let her go," I say, trembling; "it is beyond my strength." But even as I

speak I know that he has conquered—through heart, brain, and body, I am conscious that I have *lost* her.

"There is the key," I say, dashing it down on the table; "take it—but for God's sake don't let me see her, or even hear her voice. Get away now while you can, or I will not answer for myself—haste, man, haste."

I throw myself face downwards on the sofa, my hands pressed against my ears; when a minute later I tear them away I see that the door of the room beyond is open . . . she is gone from me for ever . . . my gentle love, my one love . . . Charolais . . . Charolais . . .

CHAPTER IV.

"Present fears
Are less than horrible imaginings;
My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
Shakes so my single state of mind that function
Is smother'd in surmise."

IT is a wild night, the clouds scudding rapidly across the moon's face seem to be blown on their course by the high winds that will cease not in their wild work till our coast is strewn with the wreck of many a gallant ship, with the lives of many a husband—a father, for whom there will be bitter weeping on the morrow.

And in my heart, too, all is tumult and despair, for to-day a certain chill, terrible conviction has come home to me: how, not for sake of honour, or love, or duty am I to be parted for ever from my Lady Green Sleeves, but for a reason stronger than either of these, for the reason that Death has called her, and that she is going to him faster far than she ever hurried to the arms of her earthly lover.

She has been ailing a long while, but it is only during the past few weeks that the boys' faces have grown sad and pale, that they have turned their heads aside when speaking her name, and still, *still* it did not come home to me that her illness was aught but the languor and weakness she always feels in autumn, until in Ullathorne's eyes to-day I saw by chance a heartbroken look of pity, that somehow told me the truth.

And then—when in my agony I would have

gone to her, have convinced myself with my own eyes that my fears, his hesitating words meant nothing, he told me that I must not go—for that in her present weak state it was as much as her life was worth to see me. And then, God forgive me, but I cursed him that he had not told me sooner, before the sight of him that she loved best on earth had power to harm her; but not heeding my mad words, he told me how only quite lately they had begun to fear for her, and how there seemed to be no reason for her fading but sheer weakness, and inability or even desire to live, and how not even the child had power to rouse her for more than a moment now. "She has never been the same since that night last spring . . ." he went on, sadly; "she blames herself so bitterly for going to you . . . she has realised what your life is so much more keenly since that terrible scene . . . I think she got a

shock then, Dick, from which she has never been able to rally."

I wrung from him that she was at Sieviking with Pink May, and this I took to be the saddest omen of all, for I know how since my enemy had spread the story of Hagar abroad in the neighbourhood, Green Sleeves had shrunk from the bare thought of re-visiting the old place.

And so the last, only mercy I can do my darling is to stay away from her . . . I am to submit to lose her certainly, rather than that the fear of my injuring her shall imperil her weak life . . . Oh! sweetheart, when thou liest past any chance of suffering from the violence of one who never harmed thee save through excess of love, shall I not go mad with thinking how, if thou wert to die, I might have soothed thy dying moments as none other living could?

In the valley of the shadow of death no kiss or word of mine could work thee ill; with the sacredness of the future upon thee thou mightest speak some words of comfort to him that thou leavest, and do no sin . . .

"God help those who let her die without permitting me to see her once again!" I said, as I parted with Ullathorne to-day; but as he turned away, there was that in his face which told of a misery only one degree less than mine.

I have but one ray of hope, and that a feeble one. How, if indeed she were in serious danger, they would scarcely dare hinder my going to her . . . How it is because there is yet a chance that the trembling flicker of life may be cherished into a steady flame that they would guard her so jealously against the possibility of danger.

And somehow I know most surely that if I

could go to her *free*, if she could creep into my arms and rest there without sin or shame, that love would strengthen the springs of life at their sources, and she would not die . . . and it is this thought that works madness in my veins as I wander out on the wild November night that is in fiercest consonance with my mood.

I find myself at last on the bridge that is haunted to me by the memory of the woman whose existence alone prevents my going to her who withers and dies out yonder; and, as I lean over the parapet, looking down at the rush of hurrying waters, now gleaming pale in the moonlight, now invisible as the clouds are driven across the heavens, the story of Paul Ferroll comes into my mind.

It is years since I read it; and then I could not understand how such a man could have committed such a crime; but now in a sudden

blinding flash of light I seem to see the whole story, and heart and soul *understand* it.

How the contrast of his wife with her from whom that wife had sundered him was ever before his eyes; how the knowledge of the suffering of the woman he loved, worked silently in him; how day by day her gibes and the provocation of her presence induced in him a slow, terrible resentment, until one morning with perhaps no premeditated thought of murder in his mind, the hand obeyed the lightning impulse of the wicked will, and sped the instrument of death on its way.

I feel a hand on my arm; starting violently I turn to find myself face to face with Hagar. She has been drinking—no uncommon ocurrence with her now—and she must have followed me here step for step, and that is nothing rare; latterly her course has been farther, and farther downward, and now that by law she

has not the slightest claim upon me she has grown reckless, and cares nothing for degrading herself in my eyes so long as she can force herself into my presence, compel one word, however harsh, from my lips.

"Our old trysting place," she says, with a wild laugh, her hot breath on my cheek, one heavy arm thrown round my neck; "kiss me, Richard, and give over thinking of that poor white-faced fool at Sieviking!"

For a moment I stand motionless—with that hateful arm lying where last *her* tender arm lay, with that drunken breath close to the lips that *she* last kissed, with that insult to my gentle love mingling in my ears with the sound of the rushing waters at our feet . . . and in my heart for one awful, irresponsible moment—*murder.*

One little push—and to her death, to my darling, life . . . as a man in drowning sees

his whole past existence in a second of time, so do I now see the future that might be mine were I free of this woman . . . with my whole strength I thrust her from me at the very moment that I see a man's shape crossing the bridge towards me.

CHAPTER V.

"Weel may I kiss these pale, pale lips,
For they will never kiss me;
I'll make a vow, and keep it true,
That they'll ne'er kiss ane but thee."

MY hat has fallen off; he can see my face more clearly than I can see his. It is only when he is close at hand that I recognise Gilly.

He is mad drunk; brandy and opium have almost completed their deadly work on him, and there is the ferocious glare of the maniac in the bloodshot eyes, flecked with yellow, that meet mine in the moonlight.

"You've led me a fine chase to-night," he says, in a strange voice, such a voice as one might hear in the sleep-walker. "I passed you in the street, but lost sight of you once or twice." He sways heavily towards the parapet as he speaks. "Good God! what's that?"

"Get you home with you, Gilly," I cry, fiercely. "What set you following me here to-night? You are in no state to be abroad—get you gone, I say."

But he does not heed me; he is staring towards the middle of the bridge at something which a moment ago lay prone where that desperate impulse from my arms hurled it, and, as it rises, he staggers a step or two forward, and comes face to face with Hagar.

A scream of mortal fear rings out on the night; mingling with it is a sound like the growl of a wild beast, as Gilly springs at her throat, and fastens there.

"*You!*" he cries, shaking her in his grasp as a terrier shakes a rat, his distorted face glaring frightfully on hers as his long bony fingers strangle the very cry in her throat as it rises for help. "At last—at last——"

It has all passed with the rapidity of lightning . . . I can understand now how on an occasion of unexampled emergency a brave man may be reckoned coward, as another may be held accessory to a murder, because in the one supreme moment only when help could have availed, his powers have been paralysed by shock beyond the power of interference. . . . . Momentary as has been my inaction, it may yet have proved fatal, for, as I dash forward, I see how beneath that awful grip her eyes are starting from their sockets—that her face is livid.

There is the strength of a dozen men in his hands as he drags her to and fro, she clutching

feebly at his clothes and face. As well try to unlock those fingers by force as to tear asunder rivets of steel—she would die beneath my very effort to save her. Between the eyes I strike him a blow that might fell an ox, and like one he drops at my feet, and I know that Hagar's life is saved.

Her face is horrible in the moonlight as she falls back. In these few moments she has tasted the whole bitterness of death, and perhaps now is conscious only of how she has missed its peace, but I have time for no more than a look at her, for scarcely has Gilly dropped, than he again staggers to his feet, and with the persistent instinct of the drunkard makes straight for Hagar.

"Back!" I cry, throwing her behind me, but he comes shouting on, shouting such words as convince me how drink has in very truth overthrown his reason, and that he is—mad.

"How dare you come between my wife and me?" he cries, with a curse; "leave us to reckon with one another, or it shall be the worse for you." And blind with drink and fury, he once more tries to seize her.

"This woman is not your wife," I cry, as I repulse him; "you have mistaken her for another person—you will be sorry for this mad night's work to-morrow morning."

"That is not my wife?" he says, in a curiously-sobered tone; "then supposing you tell me *whose* wife she legally is at the present moment?"

"Mine."

He bursts out into a wild peal of laughter.

"Before God, if one of us two be mad to-night, Sieviking, I am not that man. I married yon poor wretch fifteen years ago in Paris—I told you the story once, but you've forgotten it" . . His gaze wanders, the fumes

of opium once more obscure his brain. "Fifteen long years my fingers have had that itch in them . . . poor thing, and I loved her once, I wouldn't have hurt that pretty throat for worlds . . ."

He is no longer in the dangerous stage, but the maudlin. Such a trifle as this I am able to note as I turn to the woman who still cowers behind me.

"Hagar, is it true?"

But even as I ask her, some such keen and bitter pain runs through my heart as he may know who after undergoing the slow tortures of starvation sees set before him a feast that he has not strength to taste, that comes to him too late. . .

She looks up at me, ghastly as the dead, and I say to myself that had the fires of love never been lit in this woman's eyes, my darling might be strong and happy now.

"If you had asked me five minutes ago," she says, slowly, "I would have sworn that it was a lie . . . I would have moved heaven and earth to keep you from *her* a little longer, but you saved me from *him* . . . it was like you, my love, my dear . . . never a man in the wide world your equal . . . and now you will go to her, you will be happy" . . . she snatches my hand to her lips, presses one desperate kiss upon it, then like a shadow has crossed the bridge and is gone.

CHAPTER VI.

Now keep, now keep your very life,
Bowing down, bowing down;
You have that lady to be your wife,
And aye the birks a' bowing."

DAYLIGHT is breaking cold and gray when I cross the woods of Sieviking, and pausing for a second beneath the tree that has been witness to each epoch in my life, ask myself, trembling, if I shall reach the house yonder too late.

A night mail brought me to within twelve miles of Sieviking, and these I have walked,

the first ten rapidly, but over the last two my feet linger as may those of a man who goes unwillingly to meet some evil tidings.

Yonder the old home rises before me that contains my darling, and I am free to go to her, to remain with her. Into my arms she may creep to-day with never a shadow of sin or shame upon brow or heart. Why, therefore, do I, who a month ago would have hurried to her on the wings of the wind, tarry on the threshold of my joy?

It is because a chill, awful foreboding is upon me that another lover has sped before me, and kissed her tender lips; it is because I fear to see his seal upon her brow that I shrink from that first terrible glance at her that will tell me the truth, and even as I approach the house, something strange, *unusual* about it arrests my attention.

The window of her room is open, and as I

stand still to gaze at it, a figure flits hurriedly past.

At the hall door, which is open, is drawn up an empty carriage which I know to be that of the family doctor, who lives three miles away, and while I am yet a considerable way off, he comes out, gets into it, and drives away.

He does not see me, nor do I seek to stop him; I shall hear the truth fast enough in the house yonder, never fear.

But as I cross the threshold hope and I have done with one another as much as though I were about to raise the coffin-lid to take a last look at my darling's face, and it is with no shock of surprise or pain that from the parlour to my right I hear the low, agonised sound of the boys' weeping.

"It *isn't* true . . . it *can't* be true . . ." sobs the Squiffer; "there is nothing the matter

with her, but weakness and fretting after Dick. She would get quite well if she were with him. . ."

"He must be sent for, he must be told," says Solomon, miserably; "he can't harm her *now* . . . O! Charolais, Charolais . . ."

"No, I cannot harm her now, I shall never harm her any more," I say to myself as I go noiselessly upstairs to my darling's room, of which the door, as the window, is wide set open as though she perished for lack of air.

On the threshold I meet Pink May coming out; she is crying bitterly, but without a sound, as though she would not have *her* know it; and even when she sees me utters no cry, but, as one whose heart is too weighed down for speech, puts her arms around me, and so we stand for a moment, then I set her back, and go in, closing the door behind me.

Wan as an Easter lily, Green Sleeves is lying

on her white bed with dark eyes closed, and pale hands folded on her breast. As I draw near, I say to myself that I come indeed too late, for that she is already dead.

But even as the thought is born, her eyes open, with something in them more solemn than mere human wonder, she sees, and holds out to me those weak arms, and so for the last time our hearts beat once more against each other.

How shall I tell her my news of earth with this message of heaven ringing sweetly in her ears?

With a terrible pang I somehow realize that she is glad and ready to go—that she is setting out on her journey *willingly*, and that all my love has not power to stay her one moment on her way.

"How quickly you have come," she says, by and by in her gentle voice; "until yester-

day they did not know for certain how it was with me . . . and then when I was taken ill in the night they were frightened, and sent for the doctor, but he cannot do me any good, dear; no one can do me any good now."

She is smoothing the hair from my forehead as it rests against her bosom, with a touch in which is no passionate clinging as of earth to earth; already she is of one land, I of another; our real farewell of heart to heart was spoken a long while ago now.

"You will suffer less when I am gone," she says, softly; "the struggle, the longing to be near me will be over . . . and I, I have given over struggling now, dear, during the last few days somehow I seem to have found *peace*."

"But supposing that you need not struggle against it, my darling?" I cry; "supposing that we may be together always——?"

"Hush!" she says, very solemnly; "O! do not vex me with such words now. It was my fault, all my fault that terrible scene last spring . . . but I was punished, for when I saw you and Ullathorne, as I thought, about to fight, perhaps kill one another on my account, something struck me to the very heart, and though I did not cry out, I think I got my death blow then, Dick."

And so my violence slew her . . O! Green Sleeves, my heart, my heart . . .

"It is better as it is," she says, after a little pause; "you will not miss me, for we have been so long apart, and you will bring up our child . , . I thought I loved him as well as you once, but I know differently by now."

She pauses for a moment, for her breath is faint, then goes on again.

"I thought to-night that perhaps I should not see you again; I seemed to see you arriving

too late, and shutting the door behind you, coming to my side here, and looking down on me, Dick . . . and I thought that you would say to yourself 'though she would not come to me without honour, she must have loved me or she would have been able to live without me,' and then I opened my eyes, and you were actually before me."

"It is all fancy from beginning to end, my darling," I cry, desperately; "you have made up your mind to die from sheer lack of desiring to live, and for my sake and our child's, you must not, you *shall* not, for O! Green Sleeves, there is neither sin nor shame in our loving each other now, for you are my wife, sweetheart—*you* have been my real wife all through."

"In the eyes of God, not of man," she says, sadly. "O! Dick, death would be very bitter instead of sweet to me had we ever been happy at such a terrible price."

"Green Sleeves," I say, kneeling beside her, but still supporting her in my arms, "Hagar was never my wife at all . . . she was married to Gilfillan in Paris fifteen years ago."

For a moment I say to myself that the shock of my news has killed her. Then—

"I am your *wife?*" she says, trembling.

"My love, my darling, always my wife, my *only* wife . . . and you would go from me, you would leave me here alone . . ."

"I wanted to go," she says, almost in a whisper. "I was glad to go, but now . . . *now* . . ."

Love wakes in her . . . life stirs in her veins, her lips tremble towards mine, and a faint colour comes to her cheek . . . she throws her arms around me, and clings with all her poor strength to my heart, a woman now with earthly feet that fear to leave the ground, no

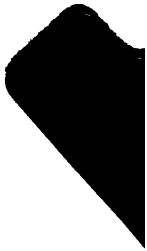
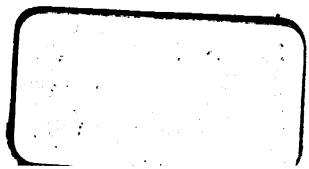
angel that eagerly desires to spread its white pinions heavenward in flight . . .

"But the doctor said that I *could* not live, Dick . . . and I was glad . . . O! hold me, keep me, do not let me go . ." But even as she speaks, her arms relax, and white and insensible, as though she were already dead, she lies in my arms.

* * * *

Shall I hold thee, shall I keep thee, my beloved, O! my beloved?

If love can save, if prayer can win, if skill can avail, then may our Lady Green Sleeves be spared to us yet . . . and Spring, who hideth so many secrets in her beautiful warm breast, shall tell us that which nor I, nor any medicine, nor any man living upon earth can know.

THE END.

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